

## SECTION 59

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

### OVERVIEW

Received on August 7, 1831, shortly after Joseph Smith's arrival in Jackson County, Missouri (designated as 'Zion'), this revelation addresses a community seeking to establish a holy city. Following the death of Polly Knight, the first Church member to die in Zion, the text pivots to instructions for the living. It establishes a covenantal framework where the 'blessings of the earth' and 'eternal life' are contingent upon strict adherence to commandments, specifically the observance of the Sabbath day ('the Lord's day'). The text institutes a system of 'sacraments' and 'oblations' to keep believers 'unspotted from the world.' It reflects a high-demand religious structure where God's favor is directly correlated to human performance, promising that those who offer a 'broken heart and contrite spirit' and keep the commandments will receive the fullness of the earth. It notably characterizes 'much laughter' as sin and defines the successful believer as one who confesses God's hand in all things while maintaining strict obedience.

### KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Jesus Christ), Joseph Smith, The Saints in Zion, Polly Knight (Historical context, implied in v2)

### DOCTRINES ANALYZED

#### 1. CONDITIONAL ETERNAL LIFE

**Assertion:** Eternal life is a reward granted to those who perform works of righteousness.

*"But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. (D&C 59:23)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, eternal life is explicitly defined as a free gift of God (Charisma) found in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:23), received through faith apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9). D&C 59:23 fundamentally alters this by framing eternal life as a 'reward' for 'doing the works of righteousness.' This shifts the basis of salvation from Christ's finished work to the believer's ongoing performance, establishing a merit-based soteriology.

#### 2. SANCTIFICATION THROUGH RITUAL

**Assertion:** Keeping oneself 'unspotted from the world' is achieved through Sabbath observance and offering sacraments.

*"And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day (D&C 59:9)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** James 1:27 mentions keeping oneself unspotted from the world as a mark of pure religion, but D&C 59:9 prescribes a ritual solution ('offer up thy sacraments') to this moral problem. Evangelicalism teaches that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin (1 John 1:7) and that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer. By tying spiritual purity to the performance of weekly rituals, this text introduces a sacramental necessity that mediates grace through human action rather than direct faith in Christ.

#### 3. CONDITIONAL DIVINE FAVOR

**Assertion:** God is offended by and wrathful toward those who do not obey His commandments.

*"And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments. (D&C 59:21)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Romans 8:1 declares there is 'no condemnation' for those in Christ Jesus. However, D&C 59:21 suggests that God's wrath is rekindled by a lack of obedience. This creates a theological framework where the believer's standing before God is unstable and dependent on their current level of obedience and gratitude, rather than being secured once-for-all by the propitiation of Christ (1 John 2:2).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

**Theological Gap:** D&C 59 re-establishes a Deuteronomic paradigm (blessings for obedience, cursings for disobedience) and applies it to eternal salvation. While Evangelicals affirm that obedience is a fruit of salvation, this text makes it the root. Specifically, verse 23's assertion that 'he who doeth the works... shall receive... eternal life' is a direct inversion of Ephesians 2:8-9. Furthermore, the text introduces a legalistic burden regarding 'laughter' and 'commandments not a few' that contradicts the freedom of the Christian found in the New Testament (Galatians 5:1).

Shared Values:

Importance of the Ten Commandments (v6); Necessity of loving God and neighbor (v5-6); Value of gratitude (v7); Sabbath rest (v10)

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Eternal life is explicitly conditioned on 'doing works of righteousness' (v23).
- 2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Sanctification and purity ('unspotted') are achieved through human ritual performance (v9) rather than Christ's finished work.
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper (Divine Attributes) – God's wrath is depicted as active against believers who fail to obey commandments (v21), contradicting the satisfaction of wrath in the Atonement.

Semantic Warnings:

"Sacraments"

**In Text:** Ordinances (specifically the Lord's Supper) performed to keep one unspotted from the world.  
**Evangelical:** Evangelicals generally use 'Ordinances' (Baptism/Communion) as symbolic acts of obedience and remembrance, not means of saving grace or essential for maintaining a state of grace.  
**Example:** *In D&C 59:9, sacraments are a mechanism for purity. In 1 Corinthians 11, the Lord's Supper is a memorial proclamation of Christ's death.*

"Eternal Life"

**In Text:** Exaltation; the highest degree of glory earned through works of righteousness (v23).  
**Evangelical:** Life with God, beginning at the moment of salvation, given freely to all believers (John 17:3).  
**Example:** *D&C 59:23 frames eternal life as a future reward for works; Romans 6:23 frames it as a present gift through Christ.*

SOTERIOLOGY

**Salvation Defined:** Inheriting the earth (temporal) and receiving a crown/eternal life (eternal) (v2, v23).  
**How Attained:** By coming to Zion, obeying the gospel, being faithful and diligent, and doing works of righteousness (v3-4, v23).  
**Basis of Assurance:** Confidence is based on one's own faithfulness, diligence, and obedience to 'commandments not a few' (v4).  
**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text explicitly links the reward of eternal life to the 'doer' of works (v23), whereas Sola Fide links justification to the 'believer' in Him who justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Love the Lord with all heart, might, mind, and strength (v5)
- 2. Love neighbor as thyself (v6)
- 3. Do not steal, commit adultery, or kill (v6)
- 4. Thank the Lord in all things (v7)
- 5. Offer a sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit (v8)
- 6. Go to the house of prayer on the Lord's day (v9)

7. Rest from labors on the Lord's day (v10)
8. Confess sins to brethren and the Lord (v12)
9. Prepare food with singleness of heart (v13)
10. Do not engage in much laughter (v15)

**Implicit Obligations:**

1. Maintain a cheerful countenance while performing religious duties (v15)
2. Acknowledge God's hand in every specific event or provision (v21)
3. Accept 'commandments not a few' (v4) as a blessing rather than a burden

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Offer up sacraments (Lord's Supper) on the Sabbath (v9, v12)
2. Offer oblations (v12)
3. Fasting (v13-14)

**EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**

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**Discovery Questions:**

1. In verse 23, it says those who do works of righteousness receive eternal life as a reward. How do you reconcile that with Romans 6:23, which calls eternal life a free gift?
2. Verse 21 says God is offended if we don't obey His commandments. Since we all still sin, does that mean God is constantly offended with you? How do you find peace?
3. Verse 9 suggests we offer sacraments to keep ourselves 'unspotted from the world.' How does this compare to 1 John 1:7, which says the blood of Jesus is what cleanses us?
4. The text mentions 'commandments not a few' (v4). Do you feel that the sheer number of requirements brings you closer to God or creates a burden?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The desire to be unspotted from the world. – The text correctly identifies the human need for purity and separation from sin. However, it prescribes a ritual solution. [James 1:27, 1 John 1:7. We cannot wash ourselves through rituals; only the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness.]
2. Rest from labors. – The Sabbath is a shadow of the true rest we find in Christ. We cease from our works-righteousness to trust in His work. [Hebrews 4:9-10. 'For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works...']

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must constantly perform 'works of righteousness' to secure the 'reward' of eternal life, leading to a lack of assurance.
2. Fear of Divine Displeasure [Severe] – Verse 21 creates a 'walking on eggshells' relationship with God, where any failure to acknowledge Him or obey a commandment kindles His wrath.
3. Legalism [Moderate] – The prohibition of 'much laughter' (v15) and the mention of 'commandments not a few' (v4) imposes a heavy, joyless burden of behavioral policing.

**EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic Revelation.

**Verification Method:** Internal spiritual witness ('the Spirit beareth record', v24) and the authority of the prophet.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) to test spirits and prophecies (1 John 4:1). This text demands acceptance based on the assertion of the speaker ('I, the Lord') and subjective spiritual confirmation, bypassing biblical testing.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** August 7, 1831.

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (claimed dictation from the Lord).

**Textual Issues:** The text reflects the immediate context of the Jackson County settlement. The promise that the faithful 'shall inherit the earth' (v2) was understood literally regarding the Missouri land, which they were driven from two years later, raising questions about the reliability of the prophetic promise.