

SECTION 74

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 74, received in 1830, presents itself as a divine explanation of 1 Corinthians 7:14. Joseph Smith addresses the Christian debate regarding infant baptism by recontextualizing the biblical passage. The text asserts that in the apostolic era, a conflict existed where unbelieving husbands desired to circumcise their children, subjecting them to the Law of Moses, which rendered the children 'unholy' by leading them away from the Gospel. Smith interprets Paul's counsel not as general advice on mixed marriages, but as a specific directive to avoid unions that would enforce the Law of Moses. The revelation concludes with a definitive theological claim: little children are holy and sanctified through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, thereby negating the need for circumcision or, by extension, infant baptism. This text serves to establish the LDS doctrine of the innocence of children while simultaneously demonstrating Smith's prophetic authority to clarify and correct biblical interpretation.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, Paul the Apostle

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. INNOCENCE OF CHILDREN

Assertion: Little children are holy and sanctified automatically through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, not requiring rituals like circumcision or baptism.

"But little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ (D&C 74:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology generally holds to the doctrine of Original Sin (Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12), teaching that humans inherit a sin nature. While many evangelicals believe in an 'Age of Accountability' where God's grace covers infants who die, D&C 74 asserts that children are 'sanctified' through the Atonement automatically. This suggests the Atonement is universally efficacious for children without the instrument of faith, differing from the evangelical view that the Atonement is sufficient for all but efficient only for those who believe (or, in the case of infants, applied by God's specific mercy, not necessarily a blanket 'holiness' inherent to the child).

2. PROPHETIC BIBLICAL REVISIONISM

Assertion: The biblical text (1 Corinthians 7) is incomplete or misunderstood without modern prophetic revelation supplying the 'true' historical context.

"For this cause the apostle wrote unto the church... giving unto them a commandment... that a believer should not be united to an unbeliever; except the law of Moses should be done away (D&C 74:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: In 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, Paul explicitly instructs believers in mixed marriages *not* to divorce their unbelieving spouses ('let him not put her away'). D&C 74:5 reinterprets this, claiming Paul gave a commandment that they 'should not be united' to unbelievers to avoid the Law of Moses. This revisionism changes Paul's pastoral instruction (staying in the marriage to sanctify the spouse) into a prohibitive command (avoiding the marriage to escape the Law). This undermines the perspicuity and sufficiency of the Bible.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the conclusion (children don't need baptism) aligns with Baptist theology, the premise creates a significant gap. First, the denial of Original Sin (children are 'holy' by default) contradicts Romans 5. Second, the hermeneutical method—where a prophet alters the meaning of a biblical text to say the opposite of its plain reading (Paul saying 'don't unite' vs. Bible saying 'don't divorce')—creates a fundamental authority conflict. The text asserts that the Atonement sanctifies without faith, whereas Evangelicalism teaches justification by faith alone.

Shared Values:

Rejection of the necessity of the Law of Moses for Christians.; Belief in the Atonement of Jesus Christ.; Rejection of infant baptism (shared with Credobaptist Evangelicals).

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text claims to correct/explain the Bible but contradicts the plain reading of 1 Corinthians 7:12-13.
2. [Major] Anthropology (Doctrine of Man) – Denies Original Sin by asserting children are inherently holy.

Semantic Warnings:

"Sanctified"

In Text: Automatically made holy and pure by the Atonement (applied to children).

Evangelical: Set apart for God's use; in 1 Cor 7:14, it refers to 'federal holiness' or legitimacy within the family unit, not necessarily internal salvation.

Example: *In D&C 74, the child is sanctified (saved/pure) automatically. In 1 Cor 7:14, the unbelieving husband is 'sanctified' by the wife, which clearly doesn't mean he is saved, but rather set apart in a way that allows the marriage to continue.*

"Unholy"

In Text: A state resulting from being subject to the Law of Moses and rejecting the Gospel.

Evangelical: Common, profane, or ritually unclean.

Example: *D&C 74 claims Jews believed children were 'unholy' (sinful/lost). Historically, Jews viewed children as ritually clean and part of the covenant.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: For children: Automatic sanctification through the Atonement. For adults: Implied acceptance of the Gospel.

How Attained: Passive attainment for children (universalism for infants).

Basis of Assurance: The declaration of the revelation.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text teaches that the Atonement is applied to children without faith. While Evangelicals agree infants are not condemned, they attribute this to God's specific mercy or lack of accountability, whereas this text asserts an ontological change ('sanctified') without faith.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not consider little children unholy (v6-7)
2. Reject the tradition of the Law of Moses/circumcision regarding children (v6)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's interpretation of the Bible over the grammatical-historical reading
2. Reject infant baptism (implied by the rejection of the 'unholy children' tradition)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, Paul tells believers in mixed marriages, 'let him not put her away' (do not divorce). D&C 74:5 says Paul commanded them 'not to be united.' How do you reconcile Paul's advice to stay married in the Bible with the claim here that he told them not to be united?
2. D&C 74:6 mentions a tradition among Jews that 'little children are unholy.' Since Jewish law generally views children as pure and not bearing original sin, where do you think this tradition came from?
3. If the unbelieving husband is 'sanctified' by the wife in verse 1, does that mean the husband is saved? If not, why does the word 'sanctified' mean 'saved/holy' when applied to the children in verse 7?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Sanctity of Children – Jesus welcomed children and used them as examples of faith. This desire to see children as safe in God's hands bridges to the Father's love. [Matthew 19:14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Hermeneutical Instability [Severe] – The believer learns that the Bible cannot be trusted to mean what it says. Even clear instructions (like 'do not divorce') can be reinterpreted by a prophet to mean the opposite ('do not be united'). This creates a dependency on the prophet for all truth and an inability to rely on God's Word directly.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Acceptance of the Prophet's authority to interpret and expand upon biblical texts.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit through the text of Scripture itself (2 Timothy 3:16), using hermeneutics to understand the author's intent. D&C 74 relies on extra-biblical revelation to supply meaning that contradicts the plain reading of the biblical text.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text claims to explain 1 Corinthians 7:14 but introduces anachronistic elements (Jews believing children are 'unholy') that reflect 19th-century theological debates rather than 1st-century realities.