

SECTION 82

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

OVERVIEW

Given in April 1832 in Independence, Missouri, this revelation addresses a council of high priests establishing the 'United Firm' (later the United Order) to manage the commercial and publishing interests of the Church. The text outlines a system of consecration where specific leaders are bound by a covenant to manage the affairs of the poor and the bishopric. Theologically, the section is significant for establishing a transactional view of the divine-human relationship. It asserts that God is 'bound' when believers obey, guaranteeing blessings, but conversely, it introduces a severe doctrine regarding forgiveness: if a believer sins after being forgiven, 'the former sins return' upon them. This establishes a probationary state of justification rather than a permanent one. The text mandates economic equality based on needs and wants, with the surplus dedicated to the church's storehouse, framing financial stewardship as a prerequisite for Zion's establishment.

KEY FIGURES

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DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. REVOCABLE JUSTIFICATION

Assertion: Forgiveness of sins is conditional and revocable; if a person sins again, all previously forgiven sins return to their account.

"go your ways and sin no more; but unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God. (D&C 82:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, justification is a forensic, legal declaration by God that a sinner is righteous solely through faith in Christ (Romans 3:24-28). This status is permanent because it relies on Christ's finished work, not the believer's fluctuating performance. D&C 82:7 introduces a 'probationary forgiveness' where the believer's slate is wiped clean only tentatively. If the believer falters, the legal guilt of past sins is reinstated. This suggests that the atonement's efficacy is contingent on the believer's future perfection ('sin no more'), effectively placing the burden of maintaining salvation on the believer rather than on Christ's intercession (Hebrews 7:25).

2. TRANSACTIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

Assertion: God is contractually obligated to provide blessings when specific laws are obeyed.

"I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise. (D&C 82:10)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology holds that God is faithful to His covenants, but He is not 'bound' by human works in a transactional sense (Job 41:11, Romans 11:35). Grace is by definition unmerited favor. D&C 82:10 presents a 'law of irrevocable decree' (expanded in D&C 130:20-21) where obedience triggers a mandatory blessing. This shifts the relationship from one of father-child grace to employer-employee contract, implying that humans can leverage God's power through precise obedience.

3. ECONOMIC CONSECRATION

Assertion: Believers must covenant to manage property with an eye to the 'common property of the whole church,' with equality determined by wants and needs.

"every man according to his wants and his needs... to be cast into the Lord's storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church (D&C 82:17-18)"

Evangelical Comparison: The New Testament encourages generosity and caring for the poor (2 Corinthians 9:7), but the 'United Firm' described here mandates a specific economic structure involving the legal transfer of deeds and property to the church hierarchy (bishopric). In Evangelicalism, the 'priesthood of all believers' implies individual stewardship of resources before God, whereas this text centralizes resource control within the ecclesiastical structure as a requirement for Zion.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental incompatibility lies in the mechanism of forgiveness. D&C 82:7 posits that forgiveness is a temporary suspension of penalty that can be revoked if the believer sins again. This creates a 'cumulative guilt' system where a believer is never truly free from their past until the end of their probation. Evangelical theology asserts that Christ's death was a 'once for all' (Hebrews 10:10) payment. When a believer is justified, the debt is paid, not merely suspended. Furthermore, the 'God is bound' doctrine (v10) diminishes divine sovereignty, placing the initiative in the hands of the creature rather than the Creator.

Shared Values:

Importance of forgiving others (Matthew 6:14); Care for the poor; Stewardship of resources; Desire for holiness

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide / Justification – Denies the permanence of justification by claiming former sins return upon new transgression.
- 2. [Critical] Christology (Finished Work) – Implies Christ's atonement does not permanently satisfy the wrath of God for the believer's past sins if they stumble again.
- 3. [Major] Sola Gratia / Sovereignty – God is 'bound' by human action, making grace a debt God owes to the obedient (Rom 4:4 contrast).
- 4. [Minor] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where specific men control the 'common property' and access to the storehouse.

Semantic Warnings:

"Forgiveness"

In Text: A conditional release from penalty that is revoked if future sin occurs (v7).
Evangelical: A permanent removal of transgression based on Christ's blood (Colossians 2:13-14).
Example: *In D&C 82, a man who steals, repents, and then steals again is guilty of *both* thefts. In the Bible, the first theft remains under the blood of Christ.*

"Zion"

In Text: A literal city to be built in Independence, Missouri (v12-13).
Evangelical: Often refers to Jerusalem, the people of God, or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22).
Example: *The text commands the enlargement of borders of a physical location in Missouri.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: In this text, salvation is linked to 'Zion' increasing in beauty and the individual maintaining a standing where former sins do not return.

How Attained: Through strict obedience to covenants, specifically the United Order/Firm, and enduring without returning to sin.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is low and based on current performance; 'if you fall not from your steadfastness' (v24).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Sola Fide is negated by the requirement of covenantal works (managing stewardship) and the threat of returning sins. Romans 8:1 ('There is therefore now no condemnation') is contradicted by v7.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Forgive one another to receive forgiveness (v1)
- 2. Refrain from sin to avoid judgment (v2)
- 3. Bind yourselves by a bond and covenant (v11, v15)
- 4. Manage the affairs of the poor (v12)
- 5. Be equal in claims on properties based on needs (v17)

6. Seek the interest of neighbors (v19)
7. Make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness (v22)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the authority of the United Firm/Order
2. Submit financial assets to the Bishopric's management
3. Maintain a state of sinlessness to prevent the return of former sins

Ritual Requirements:

1. Entering into a formal 'bond and covenant' (v11)
2. Consecration of properties to the storehouse (v18)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read in verse 7 that 'former sins return' if we sin again, how does that affect your sense of peace with God?
2. If God is 'bound' when we obey (v10), does that mean we are earning His blessings, or is it still grace?
3. How do you reconcile the return of former sins with the promise in the Bible that God remembers our sins no more (Hebrews 8:12)?
4. What does it look like practically to be 'delivered over to the buffetings of Satan' (v21)?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Bond and Covenant – Humans long for a secure connection that cannot be broken. While human covenants fail (and the United Firm did fail), the New Covenant in Christ's blood is truly unbreakable because it depends on Christ's faithfulness, not ours. [Hebrews 6:17-19 (God's oath and promise as an anchor for the soul).]
2. The Storehouse – This reflects a desire for provision and community care. Christ is the Bread of Life who fills the ultimate spiritual hunger, and in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [John 6:35, Colossians 2:3]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Cumulative Guilt [Severe] – The believer lives under the constant threat that one slip-up will bring the entire weight of their past life's sins crashing back down on them. This prevents true assurance and creates a 'probationary' anxiety.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The idea that God is 'bound' only when we do exactly what He says implies that if a blessing is missing, it is **always** the believer's fault for not performing the correct input to trigger the output.
3. Financial Control [Moderate] – The requirement to consecrate property and be 'equal' under the direction of the bishopric places a heavy burden of financial surrender on the individual, linking their economic status directly to their spiritual standing.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (The voice of the Lord through Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation serves as the test; if blessings follow, the principle is verified (v10).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105, 2 Timothy 3:16) as the final test for truth. D&C 82 relies on the immediate authority of the modern prophet, whose words are treated as the direct voice of God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 26, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The term 'United Firm' was later changed to 'United Order' in the 1835 edition to protect the identity of the participants from creditors/enemies, using pseudonyms (e.g., Enoch for Joseph Smith) which were later removed in 1981.