

SECTION 83

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 83, received in April 1832, addresses the practical and economic implications of the Law of Consecration regarding the vulnerable within the early Latter-day Saint community. Specifically, it delineates the rights of women and children to financial support. It establishes a hierarchy of responsibility: first, husbands and fathers are responsible for their families; second, if the husband/father is absent or unable, the Church (via the Lord's storehouse) assumes responsibility for widows and orphans. Crucially, the text conditions church 'fellowship' for widows on their faithfulness, distinguishing between spiritual standing and legal property rights ('inheritances') protected by the laws of the land. This text serves as a foundational document for the LDS Church's welfare system, rooting social safety nets in divine mandate and communal consecration.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord, Joseph Smith, Husbands/Fathers, Widows, Orphans, The Bishop (implied as keeper of the storehouse)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE LORD'S STOREHOUSE (CONSECRATION)

Assertion: The Church is divinely mandated to maintain a storehouse through member consecrations to provide for widows, orphans, and the poor when family support fails.

"And the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for (D&C 83:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, charity is a moral imperative flowing from the regenerate heart, often organized through diaconal ministries (Acts 6). However, D&C 83 frames this within the 'Law of Consecration,' a specific socio-economic order where property and resources are dedicated to the church hierarchy for redistribution. This differs from the New Testament model of voluntary giving (2 Corinthians 9:7) by establishing a centralized 'storehouse' system as a doctrinal requirement for the church's existence and the member's standing.

2. CONDITIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Assertion: A widow's spiritual standing and fellowship in the church are contingent upon her not being a 'transgressor' and remaining 'faithful.'

"And if they are not faithful they shall not have fellowship in the church (D&C 83:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text explicitly links 'fellowship'—a term often denoting both social acceptance and spiritual communion—to the condition of being 'faithful' and 'not found transgressors.' In the Evangelical baseline, standing before God is secured by Justification by Faith Alone (Sola Fide). While local church membership can be revoked for gross unrepentant sin (1 Corinthians 5), the language here suggests a legalistic framework where support and standing are earned through behavior, contrasting with the unconditional nature of God's adoption of the believer.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the source of authority and the nature of the church. D&C 83 operates under the premise that God is issuing new civil and ecclesiastical laws through Joseph Smith to build a literal Zion with economic structures. Evangelicalism views the Church as a spiritual body of believers, not a theocratic government with authority to manage land inheritances or demand consecration of property. Furthermore, the conditional nature of fellowship ('if they are not faithful') introduces a works-based maintenance of standing that obscures the security of the believer in Christ.

Shared Values:

Importance of the nuclear family.; Moral obligation to care for widows and orphans.; Responsibility of fathers to provide.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new 'laws of the church' via modern revelation not found in the Bible.
2. [Minor] Universal Priesthood / Ecclesiology – Establishes a hierarchical priesthood structure to manage economic resources (Storehouse) rather than simple diaconal service.
3. [Major] Sola Gratia – Conditions 'fellowship' (and by extension, aid) on personal faithfulness rather than grace.

Semantic Warnings:

"Fellowship"

In Text: Official standing in the organization, qualifying one for economic support and spiritual participation.

Evangelical: Koinonia; spiritual participation in the body of Christ and with the Holy Spirit, based on shared faith.

Example: *In D&C 83:3, a widow loses 'fellowship' for unfaithfulness; in 1 John 1:7, fellowship is the result of walking in the light of Christ's cleansing blood.*

"Storehouse"

In Text: A physical repository and economic system for distributing consecrated goods.

Evangelical: Often metaphorical in the NT (treasures in heaven) or referring to OT temple practices, not a mandated NT church institution.

Example: *D&C 83 mandates a physical storehouse for welfare; the NT describes voluntary collections for the saints (1 Cor 16:1-2).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to 'fellowship' in the church and obedience to its laws.

How Attained: Through faithfulness and adherence to the laws of the church (including consecration).

Basis of Assurance: Standing is maintained by not being a 'transgressor'.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes maintaining status through behavior ('if they are not faithful they shall not have fellowship'), contrasting with the permanence of justification by faith (Romans 8:38-39).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Husbands must support their wives.
2. Parents must support their children until they are of age.
3. The Church must provide for widows, orphans, and the poor via the storehouse.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Members must contribute 'consecrations' to maintain the storehouse.
2. Widows must remain 'faithful' to maintain church fellowship.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of property/resources (implied context).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, it says a widow loses fellowship if she is not faithful. How does the church define 'faithful' in this context?
2. How does the concept of the 'Lord's storehouse' affect how you view your property and finances today?

3. If fellowship is conditional on behavior, how does a member find assurance that they are accepted by God when they struggle with sin?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Storehouse – Just as the storehouse provides for those who lack, Christ is the bread of life who provides for our spiritual bankruptcy. [Philippians 4:19 'And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.']
2. The Advocate for the Fatherless – God identifies Himself as the Father to the fatherless and defender of widows, ultimately fulfilled in Christ bringing us into God's family. [Psalm 68:5, John 14:18 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial/Stewardship Pressure [Moderate] – The burden of 'consecration' implies that all property ultimately belongs to the church/Lord, creating a pressure to give beyond capacity or feel guilty for personal ownership.
2. Fear of Rejection [Severe] – For a widow or vulnerable person, the threat that 'if they are not faithful they shall not have fellowship' creates anxiety that their material survival and social acceptance are contingent on their performance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith acting as mouthpiece).

Verification Method: Testimony of the Spirit regarding the truthfulness of Joseph Smith's calling.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test truth claims against the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11), whereas this text relies on the acceptance of Joseph Smith's continuing revelation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 30, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: Part of the evolving revelations regarding the United Firm/Order. The language reflects the specific legal and social context of Independence, Missouri.