

SECTION 84

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 84, received in September 1832, is a foundational text regarding Mormon ecclesiology and soteriology. Known as the 'Revelation on Priesthood,' it delineates the distinction between the Lesser (Aaronic) and Greater (Melchizedek) Priesthoods, tracing their lineage back to Adam and God. The text asserts that the 'power of godliness' is only manifest through the ordinances of the higher priesthood, without which no man can see the face of God and live. It introduces the 'Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood,' promising that those who receive these priesthoods and 'magnify their calling' will receive 'all that the Father hath.' Conversely, it warns that turning away from this covenant results in a lack of forgiveness in this world or the next. The revelation also commands the building of a temple in Independence, Missouri, within 'this generation'—a historically significant prophecy. It concludes with instructions for missionaries to travel without 'purse or scrip' and issues a condemnation upon the church for neglecting the Book of Mormon.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, Moses, Aaron, John the Baptist, Abraham, Melchizedek

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MEDIATION VIA PRIESTHOOD ORDINANCES

Assertion: Access to God's presence and the 'power of godliness' is impossible without specific priesthood ordinances.

"And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. (D&C 84:21-22)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine establishes a hierarchical mediation system where priesthood authority and ritual ordinances are absolute prerequisites for encountering God. In Evangelical theology, based on Hebrews 10:19-22 and 1 Timothy 2:5, the veil was torn, and believers have direct access to the Father through the finished work of Christ, not through a restored Levitical or Melchizedek order. The assertion that one cannot see God without these specific rituals denies the sufficiency of Christ's imputation of righteousness.

2. THE OATH AND COVENANT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: Men obtain eternal life ('all that my Father hath') by receiving the priesthood and magnifying their calling.

"For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods... and the magnifying their calling... become the sons of Moses and of Aaron... therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him. (D&C 84:33-38)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine conflates justification and sanctification, making the receipt of the Father's kingdom contingent upon 'magnifying' a priesthood office. Evangelicalism teaches that believers are already adopted as sons of God through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26), not through a priesthood lineage or oath. The promise of receiving 'all that the Father hath' suggests an ontological exaltation (becoming gods) distinct from the biblical concept of glorification.

3. AUTHORITY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Assertion: The whole church is under condemnation for neglecting the Book of Mormon, termed the 'new covenant.'

"And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon... (D&C 84:57)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Luke 22:20, Jesus identifies the New Covenant in His blood. D&C 84 redefines the New Covenant as a text (The Book of Mormon) and the commandments within it. This violates Sola Scriptura by placing a 19th-century text on par with or above the Bible, and it shifts the focus of the covenant from Christ's atonement to obedience to a new law.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 84 constructs a theological framework that is fundamentally incompatible with Evangelical Christianity. While Evangelicals view the Priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7) as non-transferable and sufficient, D&C 84 claims that a restored human priesthood is the essential conduit for the 'power of godliness.' Furthermore, the 'Oath and Covenant' introduces a merit-based system for attaining the 'Father's kingdom,' contrasting sharply with the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. The text effectively rebuilds the veil that Christ tore, placing intermediaries (priests and ordinances) between the believer and God.

Shared Values:

Necessity of repentance; Belief in the return of Christ; Moral living; Missionary zeal

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the Book of Mormon is the 'new covenant' and adds D&C 84 as binding revelation.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation/Exaltation is contingent on 'magnifying' priesthood callings and ordinances.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Re-establishes a hierarchical priesthood (Aaronic/Melchizedek) as necessary mediators.
4. [Critical] Christology – Implies Christ's work was insufficient to provide access to the Father without restored ordinances.

Semantic Warnings:

"Priesthood"

In Text: The authority and power of God delegated to man to act in His name for the salvation of the human family.

Evangelical: The unique office of Christ (High Priest) and the collective status of all believers who offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:9).

Example: In D&C 84, 'priesthood' is a hierarchical office necessary to see God. In the New Testament, all believers have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19).

"Generation"

In Text: Used in v5 to denote the timeframe for the temple building. LDS interpretation often stretches this to mean a 'dispensation' or era due to the prophecy's failure.

Evangelical: Typically refers to the people living at a specific time.

Example: The prophecy that 'this generation shall not all pass away' before the temple is built is a point of contention.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Receiving 'all that the Father hath' (Exaltation) and entering the Father's kingdom.

How Attained: By receiving the priesthood, keeping the 'Oath and Covenant,' and magnifying one's calling.

Basis of Assurance: Faithfulness in church duties and priesthood service.

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 84:33-44 presents a 'covenant of works' structure: 'Whoso is faithful... unto the magnifying their calling... become... the elect of God.' This opposes Romans 4:4-5, where righteousness is credited to the one who does not work but trusts God.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Build a temple in Missouri (v4-5)
2. Repent and remember the Book of Mormon (v57)
3. Preach the gospel without purse or scrip (v86)
4. Cleanse feet as a testimony against those who reject the message (v92)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Seek and obtain both Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods (men)

2. Magnify church callings to ensure salvation

3. Accept Joseph Smith's revelations as the word of the Lord

Ritual Requirements:

1. Priesthood ordination

2. Baptism by water

3. Washing of feet (in specific contexts of rejection)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. D&C 84:21-22 says that without priesthood ordinances, no man can see God and live. How do you reconcile this with Jesus saying 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9) or the veil of the temple tearing at His death?
2. Verse 5 says the temple in Missouri would be built in 'this generation.' Since that didn't happen, how do you interpret the phrase 'verily this is the word of the Lord' in verse 4?
3. The 'Oath and Covenant' says if we magnify our calling, we receive the Father's kingdom. How does this fit with the Bible's teaching that we are saved by grace through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9)?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire to see the face of God – The text correctly identifies the human longing to be in God's presence. The Gospel answers this not with a ladder of priesthood ordinances, but with the person of Jesus. [2 Corinthians 4:6 - God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The adherent is told that receiving the Father's kingdom depends on 'magnifying' their calling. This creates a perpetual burden of performance, where salvation is never settled but always contingent on the next level of church service.
2. Fear of Condemnation [Moderate] – The text explicitly states the 'whole church' is under condemnation (v55) for neglecting the Book of Mormon. This instills a corporate guilt and a fear that God is displeased with them collectively.
3. Exclusivity/Isolation [Moderate] – By claiming only their priesthood has the power of godliness, the text isolates the adherent from the wider body of Christ, fostering a mindset that all other expressions of faith are devoid of true power.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation through the prophet and the 'Spirit of Christ' which enlightens every man (v45-46).

Verification Method: Adherents are told that if they receive the servants, they receive the Lord (v36), and the Spirit will bear witness. Success in ministry (signs following) is also a verification (v65).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the written Word (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). D&C 84 relies on subjective enlightenment and the authority of the modern prophet, warning that rejecting the prophet's voice is rejecting God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 22-23, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text reflects the evolving theology of priesthood in early Mormonism. The distinction between Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods was not clearly present in the earliest Mormon documents (1829-1830) but is fully developed here.