

SECTION 88

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 88, often termed the 'Olive Leaf' by Joseph Smith, represents a significant expansion of Mormon cosmology and ecclesiology. Received in late 1832 and early 1833, it moves beyond simple administrative instruction to address the fundamental nature of matter, light, and law. The text asserts that the 'Light of Christ' is the governing power of the universe, filling the immensity of space and giving life to all things, effectively blurring the lines between the Creator and the physical universe. It systematizes the afterlife into three kingdoms (Celestial, Terrestrial, Telestial), explicitly stating that entrance into these kingdoms is contingent upon a person's ability to 'abide the law' associated with that specific glory. Furthermore, the text serves as a charter for the 'School of the Prophets,' instituting strict behavioral codes—including dietary and sleep regulations—and reintroducing the washing of feet not merely as an act of service, but as a binding ordinance necessary for being 'clean from the blood of this generation.' It culminates in an apocalyptic timeline of the seven trumps and the final judgment.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Firstborn/Light of Truth), Joseph Smith (The Prophet), The Holy Spirit of Promise, Michael (The Archangel/Seventh Angel), The Seven Angels (Trumpeters)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. COSMOLOGICAL MONISM (THE LIGHT OF CHRIST)

Assertion: Christ is the physical and spiritual light that fills the immensity of space, governs all things, and is in the sun, moon, and stars.

"He is in the sun, and the light of the sun... The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed (D&C 88:7, 13)."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, God is distinct from His creation (transcendent), sustaining it by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3) but not physically residing 'in' the moon or stars as their light source. D&C 88 posits a material connection where the 'Light of Christ' is a substance or energy that fills the universe, governing physics and spirituality simultaneously. This collapses the distinction between natural law and moral law, suggesting that the power making the sun shine is the same substance as the truth enlightening the mind.

2. MERIT-BASED DEGREES OF GLORY

Assertion: The level of glory a resurrected being inherits is determined by the specific law they were able to obey (abide) during mortality.

"For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory. (D&C 88:22)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches a binary eternal destiny (Heaven/Hell) determined solely by acceptance or rejection of Christ's substitutionary atonement (John 3:36). D&C 88 introduces a tiered eternity where placement is determined by personal merit and capacity to keep law. The text explicitly states that one must 'abide the law' of a kingdom to receive it. This shifts the focus from Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer (Romans 4:5) to the believer's own righteousness enabling them to withstand or 'abide' glory.

3. SANCTIFICATION OF THE EARTH

Assertion: The earth itself is a living entity that will die, be resurrected, and become a celestial kingdom for the righteous.

"The earth abideth the law of a celestial kingdom... it shall die, it shall be quickened again... and the righteous shall inherit it. (D&C 88:25-26)"

Evangelical Comparison: While the Bible speaks of a 'new heaven and new earth' (Revelation 21:1) and creation groaning for redemption (Romans 8:22), it does not teach that the planet is a sentient entity that keeps laws, dies, and is resurrected in a manner parallel to human salvation. D&C 88 anthropomorphizes the earth, claiming

it 'filleth the measure of its creation' and 'transgresseth not the law,' implying the earth has moral agency or status.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 88 presents a fundamental incompatibility with Evangelical theology in two key areas: Ontology and Soteriology. Ontologically, the text presents a universe where God, light, and matter are interconnected in a way that denies the transcendence of God (Theology Proper). God is 'in' the moon and stars, suggesting a material pantheism or panentheism. Soteriologically, the text constructs a tiered afterlife where destiny is determined by the specific 'law' an individual can 'abide.' This creates a system of works-righteousness where Christ provides the resurrection (general salvation), but the individual's obedience determines their eternal quality of life (exaltation), directly contradicting the sufficiency of Christ's atonement for full redemption.

Shared Values:

Importance of prayer and fasting; Desire for holiness/sanctification; Belief in the Second Coming of Christ; Moral living (avoiding lust, covetousness); Value of education/learning

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new laws, rituals (washing of feet as ordinance), and cosmological doctrines not found in the Bible.
- 2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Teaches that eternal glory is contingent on 'abiding the law' of that kingdom, not faith alone.
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper – Confuses the Creator with creation by placing God's essence/light physically within celestial bodies.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation/Redemption of the Soul"

In Text: Often refers to the universal resurrection of the body and spirit (D&C 88:14-16).
Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty and power of sin, resulting in eternal life with God.
Example: *In D&C 88:16, resurrection is called 'redemption of the soul,' applying to all, whereas biblical redemption is specific to the elect/believers.*

"Sanctification"

In Text: The process of becoming pure enough to 'abide' a specific degree of glory/law.
Evangelical: The process of the Holy Spirit conforming a believer to the image of Christ, following justification.
Example: *D&C 88:21 speaks of being 'sanctified through the law,' whereas biblical sanctification is by the Spirit and truth (2 Thess 2:13).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Universal resurrection (redemption of the soul) for all; 'Eternal Life' or 'Celestial Glory' for those who keep celestial law.

How Attained: Resurrection is by grace/Christ; Glory is attained by 'abiding the law' of the respective kingdom.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is based on one's ability to keep the law and receive ordinances (washing of feet).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejects Sola Fide by stating 'he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory' (v. 22). Romans 3:20 states 'by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Organize and establish a house of God (Temple)
- 2. Cease from light speeches, laughter, and lustful desires

3. Retire to bed early and arise early
4. Teach one another diligently
5. Sanctify yourselves
6. Warn your neighbor

Implicit Obligations:

1. Achieve a level of obedience sufficient to 'abide' celestial law
2. Participate in the School of the Prophets (for priesthood leadership)
3. Accept the washing of feet ordinance from the president

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordinance of the washing of feet
2. Specific salutation/greeting with uplifted hands for the School of the Prophets
3. Fasting and prayer

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 22, it says if you can't abide the law of the celestial kingdom, you can't abide the glory. How do you measure if you are successfully 'abiding' that law right now?
2. The text mentions that the earth will die and be resurrected (v. 26). How does this fit with your understanding of the earth as a creation versus a being?
3. Verse 124 commands to 'cease to sleep longer than is needful.' Do you feel that your sleeping habits impact your eternal salvation?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The School of the Prophets – Just as the early Saints desired to learn of God, Christians are disciples (learners). However, our 'school' is not based on secret rituals but on the open revelation of God's Word. [Matthew 11:28-29 ('Learn of me... for my yoke is easy')]
2. The desire for a 'House of God' – The text expresses a longing for God's presence. In the New Covenant, the believer *is* the temple where God dwells by His Spirit, not a physical building we must construct to reach Him. [1 Corinthians 6:19]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Micromanagement [Moderate] – The text regulates daily behaviors like laughter, speech, and sleep schedules (v. 121-124), attaching spiritual significance to biological functions. This creates a burden where a believer feels guilty for natural human behaviors.
2. Uncertainty of Glory [Severe] – By tying the degree of glory to the ability to 'abide the law,' the believer lives in constant uncertainty of whether their current obedience is sufficient for the Celestial Kingdom.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation through the prophet, personal spiritual experience ('voice of the Spirit'), and intellectual study.

Verification Method: Seek learning 'by study and also by faith' (D&C 88:118); drawing near to God to receive revelation.

Evangelical Contrast: While Evangelicals value study and faith, the text elevates extra-biblical revelation and subjective spiritual experience ('voice of the Spirit') to a level that supersedes or modifies biblical teaching (2 Timothy 3:16).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 27-28, 1832, and January 3, 1833.

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: Composite revelation received over several days. The 'Olive Leaf' designation highlights its intended role as a peace offering to calm tensions among leaders in Missouri.