

SECTION 93

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 93 is a pivotal theological text within Mormonism that radically redefines the ontology of God and man. Delivered in May 1833, it purports to quote a lost 'Record of John' (distinct from the biblical Gospel of John) to establish that Jesus Christ was not originally possessor of the fullness of God but grew 'from grace to grace' until He received it. This establishes a prototype for humanity: just as Christ progressed to Godhood through obedience, human beings—who are defined as uncreated 'intelligences' that were 'in the beginning with God'—can follow the same path to receive a fullness of the Father's glory. The text rejects creation *ex nihilo*, asserting that 'intelligence' and 'element' are eternal. It concludes with practical chastisements for church leaders regarding their failure to raise their children in 'light and truth,' directly linking domestic order to spiritual standing.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, The Father, John (the Baptist or Beloved, ambiguous in text), Joseph Smith, Frederick G. Williams, Sidney Rigdon, Newel K. Whitney

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE ETERNAL NATURE OF INTELLIGENCE

Assertion: Human intelligence is uncreated, co-eternal with God, and cannot be made.

"Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be." (D&C 93:29)

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology, rooted in Genesis 1:1 and Colossians 1:16, teaches that God alone is eternal and uncreated, while all other things (angels, humans, matter) are created beings dependent on Him for existence. D&C 93:29 asserts that the core identity of man ('intelligence') is self-existent and co-eternal with God. This collapses the ontological gap between Creator and creature, suggesting that God and man are of the same species and duration, differing only in progress/glory.

2. PROGRESSIVE CHRISTOLOGY

Assertion: Jesus was not fully God at the beginning of his mortal life but attained fullness through a process of growth.

"And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace... until he received a fulness" (D&C 93:12-13)

Evangelical Comparison: Biblical Christology (John 1:1, Hebrews 13:8) affirms that the Word was fully God before the incarnation and remained fully God during the incarnation (kenosis refers to veiling glory, not losing divinity or needing to acquire it). D&C 93 presents a Jesus who 'received not of the fullness at the first,' implying a period of ontological incompleteness. This presents Jesus as the first successful traveler on the path to exaltation, rather than the I AM who descended to save.

3. INNOCENCE OF CHILDREN

Assertion: Children are born innocent because Christ redeemed them from the Fall; they have no sin nature.

"Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God." (D&C 93:38)

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches that due to the Fall, all humans inherit a sin nature (Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12, Ephesians 2:3). D&C 93 teaches that the atonement of Christ automatically cleanses the effects of the Fall for infants, rendering them spiritually neutral or innocent until they reach an age of accountability. This shifts the need for redemption from birth to the moment of personal transgression.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The gap is foundational. Evangelicalism posits a Creator-creature distinction where God is 'wholly other' and man is a finite creation. D&C 93 obliterates this by claiming man was 'in the beginning with God' and that intelligence is uncreated. Furthermore, the text's Christology is adoptionist in flavor, suggesting Jesus earned His fullness over time. This leads to a soteriology of 'theosis' (becoming a god) via the same method Jesus used (obedience), contrasting sharply with the Evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone in the finished work of an eternally sufficient Savior.

Shared Values:

Importance of raising children in faith; Jesus as the Redeemer; The value of truth and knowledge; The necessity of forsaking sin

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (God as Creator) – Asserts matter and intelligence are eternal, denying God's status as the sole Creator of all reality (Ex Nihilo).
2. [Critical] Christology – Denies Christ's eternal fullness, portraying Him as a being who had to grow into Godhood.
3. [Major] Anthropology – Elevates man to a co-eternal status with God, denying the creaturely nature of humanity.
4. [Major] Hamartiology (Sin) – Denies original sin, asserting inherent innocence in children.

Semantic Warnings:

"Grace for Grace"

In Text: A ladder of progression; exchanging one level of grace to acquire a higher level, implying merit and growth.

Evangelical: In John 1:16 ('grace upon grace'), it refers to the superabundance of God's unmerited favor pouring forth from Christ's fullness to believers.

Example: D&C 93:13 says Jesus '*continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness.*' Evangelicalism says Jesus is the source of grace, not a recipient who needs it to progress.

"In the beginning"

In Text: A state of pre-mortal existence where humans existed as spirits/intelligences alongside God.

Evangelical: The moment of creation (Genesis 1:1) or the eternal state of the Word prior to creation (John 1:1).

Example: D&C 93:29 '*Man was also in the beginning with God.*'

"Truth"

In Text: Knowledge of things past, present, and future (metaphysical data).

Evangelical: Ultimately a person (Jesus, 'I am the Truth') and the revealed Word of God.

Example: D&C 93:24 defines *truth* as factual knowledge of temporal states.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Receiving a fullness of the Father's glory; knowing all things; being glorified as Christ is.

How Attained: Through obedience to commandments, following Christ's example of moving from grace to grace.

Basis of Assurance: Personal verification through receiving light and truth; successful management of one's household.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejects Sola Fide by conditioning the receipt of fullness on 'if you keep my commandments' (93:20) and defining the process as a gradual acquisition of light through works.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Forsake sins
2. Call on God's name

3. Obey God's voice
4. Keep commandments
5. Bring up children in light and truth
6. Set in order your own house (specifically to Williams, Rigdon, Smith, Whitney)
7. Translate scriptures
8. Obtain knowledge of history, countries, and kingdoms

Implicit Obligations:

1. Seek to acquire intelligence/truth to gain glory
2. Emulate Christ's progression from grace to grace
3. Maintain domestic order as a prerequisite for spiritual leadership

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly detailed in this text, though 'temple' imagery is used metaphorically for the body.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. D&C 93:13 says Jesus 'received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace.' How does that compare to Hebrews 13:8, which says Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever?
2. If our intelligence is uncreated and co-eternal with God (verse 29), in what sense is God our 'Creator' rather than just our organizer?
3. Verse 1 says we will see His face 'if' we keep the commandments. Do you feel you have kept them sufficiently to merit that sight, or do you rely on Christ's finished work?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for Fullness of Joy – The text correctly identifies that humans long for a fullness of joy that involves the whole person (body and spirit). [Psalm 16:11 'In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.' (Found in His presence, not our progress).]
2. Light and Truth – The pursuit of truth is noble, but the Gospel reveals that Truth is a Person who sets us free, not just data we accumulate. [John 14:6 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Perfectionism [Severe] – The text establishes Christ as the prototype for salvation-meaning the believer must do what He did (grow grace for grace through perfect obedience) to reach the same destination. This places the burden of self-deification on the believer's shoulders.
2. Works-Righteousness [Severe] – Verse 20 conditions receiving fullness on keeping commandments. This creates a transactional relationship with God where spiritual light is earned currency.
3. Parental Guilt/Shame [Moderate] – The text explicitly links the 'affliction' of the leaders and the power of the 'wicked one' over them to their failure to control/teach their children (verses 41-42). This implies that a child's rebellion is a direct result of the parent's spiritual failure.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation confirmed by obedience. Truth is defined as 'knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come' (93:24).

Verification Method: Obedience to commandments results in receiving 'truth and light' (93:28).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105, 2 Timothy 3:16). D&C 93 suggests knowledge is an ontological substance ('light') accumulated through moral performance.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: May 6, 1833

Authorship: Joseph Smith (claiming dictation from God)

Textual Issues: The text claims to provide the 'fulness of the record of John,' implying the biblical record is incomplete. No ancient manuscript supports this 'Record of John.'