

Section 18

The Lord revealed section 18 because Joseph, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer desired to know how to build the Church of Jesus Christ, something they knew was coming but had never done before.¹ The Lord tells Oliver specifically to rely on what he has learned from the Book of Mormon manuscript he has penned as Joseph translated. Since he knows by the Spirit that it's true, he can use it to compose a foundational document for the church that is soon to be restored. If they build the church on this foundation, hell cannot stop them.

This revelation is the first in the Doctrine and Covenants to refer to apostles, saying that Oliver and David “are called” to that calling (D&C 18:9). What should apostles do? “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (v. 10). Based on that premise—the value to God of each individual soul—the revelation gives a rationale for repentance that is centered in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This part of the revelation sounds like a sacred equation: the value of each soul is directly proportionate to the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ. He conquered death to bring the repentant to him. He feels great joy in repentant souls. Truman Madsen had this revelation in mind when he taught, “If souls are of value in direct proportion to the concern and sacrifice of our Redeemer, then we know that in the eyes of the Father and the Son, your soul—even yours—and mine—even mine—is of infinite worth.”²

¹ “[Book of Commandments, 1833](#),” p. 34, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 23, 2020.

² Truman G. Madsen, “[The Savior, the Sacrament, and Self-Worth](#),” Address given at the 1999 BYU–Relief Society Women's Conference.

That is the revealed reason for Oliver and David to cry repentance. If they spend their whole lives at it and only a single soul repents, the effort will be worthwhile. Their joy with that soul will be great in God's kingdom. How much greater joy, then, to help many repent? So they are to follow the Book of Mormon in preaching the law of the gospel with faith, hope, and charity by inviting all mankind to come to Christ and assume his name, becoming his.

After nearly two millennia, section 18 commissions new apostles. The Lord prophesies their calling. Then, beginning at verse 31, he speaks directly to them, promising grace sufficient to save them if they choose to meet his covenant conditions. Oliver and David are charged to “search out the Twelve” by discerning their godly desires, manifest in their behavior (D&C 18:37–38). The Twelve, in turn, are to act on their revealed instructions. A quorum of twelve would not be called for nearly six more years, but this revelation sets apostles Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer to the task of selecting the members of that quorum and then speaks to them directly.

What does the Lord emphasize when he commissions apostles, when he gives them their job description, their marching orders? He teaches them that Christ's Atonement, the price paid, makes each soul of infinite worth in God's sight. Based on that truth, he commissions the apostles to tell every soul to repent, to obey the law of the gospel, to become one with Christ by assuming his name.

Based on their commission in Section 18, modern apostles emphasize how the Savior's Atonement gives infinite value to each soul. “If we could truly understand the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ,” said Elder M. Russell Ballard, “we would realize how precious is *one* son or daughter of God. . . . We would strive to emulate the Savior and would never be unkind, indifferent, disrespectful, or insensitive to others.” Elder Ballard concluded, “It was Jesus who said, ‘If . . . you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be *one* soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!’ (D&C 18:15). Not only that, but great shall be the *Lord's joy* in the soul that repenteth! For precious unto Him is the *one*.”³

³ Elder M. Russell Ballard, “[The Atonement and the Value of One Soul](#),” General Conference, April 2004.