

Hard Questions in Church History

Lynne Hilton Wilson

D&C 93: Worship and Temple Preparation Part 2

Introduction

This handout first looks at D&C 93 in the context of what we learn about God and how that enhances our worship. Looking at the section as a temple preparation texts, it invites the Saints to see the face of God. Finally, we will look at the ageless challenging theological questions that D&C 93 addresses. The Prophet Joseph’s succinct answers provide evidence that he was inspired by the Lord.

Questions to Consider

- Does this section cite a record from John the Baptist or John the Beloved?
- How do we prepare to see the face of God?
- How can something come from nothing?
- How can Christ have been both absolutely human and absolutely divine at the same time?

Family Context for D&C 93 in May 1833

Joseph was twenty-seven; Emma, twenty-nine; Julia turned two years old on May 1, 1833; and Joseph III turned six months on May 6th. They had been living in the rooms above the Newel K. Whitney store for eight months. Down a short hall from their family rooms there was a translating room and a council room which acted as meeting places for the church headquarters. (They lived in this arrangement above the store for seventeen months from September 1832 to February 1834.) Nine months after this revelation, the family moved into their own private home near the Kirtland temple lot.

By May 1833, Joseph was on the final push to finish the translating the Bible, which he had begun nearly three years earlier. A few weeks after this revelation, on July 2, 1833, Joseph finished the entire Bible. He continued to edit his work and to add many corrections and commentary on the Bible over the last decade of his life but when this revelation was received, he was diligently working to finish the “New Translation.”

Outline of D&C 93

- Introduction from the Lord (D&C 93:1-7a),
- Quotes a Record from John (D&C 93:7b-18),
- The Lord’s Commentary on John’s Record (D&C 93:19-40).
- Postlude: the Lord’s chastisement and instructions to the first presidency on how to raise their families (D&C 93:41-53).

Whose record—John the Baptist or John the Beloved?

The Doctrine and Covenants has two records attributed to “John”—sections 7 and 93:7-18. For over a century, readers of D&C 93 have questioned which John this refers to. John Taylor and Orson Pratt

thought it was John the Baptist but in 1921, the scriptural committee, under the direction of Joseph F. Smith, attributed it to John the Beloved. I, too, think it is John the Beloved, due to evidence from the Gospel of John, Book of Revelation, and D&C 7 and 77 outlined below:

- John the son of Zebedee and Salome was a disciple of the John the Baptist before he met Jesus and became the beloved apostle according to modern revelation (D&C 7:1, 3, 6; 1 Nephi 14:22).
- John the Beloved witnessed Jesus’s baptism (John 1:32-42) which is addressed in D&C 93 as well.
- Jesus gave his beloved apostle John a special assignment to help build God’s kingdom throughout the history of the earth—and thereby received “power over death” (D&C 7:2; John 21:22-24).
- John, the author of the Book of Revelation, eats a scroll as a symbol of his mission “to gather the tribes of Israel; behold, this is Elias, who, as it is written, must come and restore all things” (D&C 77:14; Rev 10:9-11). In the restoration, we interpret this as the same person—the beloved apostle John.
- As part of the apostle John’s current mission to gather Israel, he may have been more involved in the restoration than just bringing the keys of the Melchizedek priesthood. It appears that the Doctrine and Covenants includes two of the apostle John’s records (D&C 7 and 93) as well as many insights into the Book of Revelation (D&C 77).

Purpose of this Revelation—Worship and Temple Preparation

1. Worship

The Lord points to the purpose of the revelation as soon as begins His commentary on John’s record. D&C 93:19 explains that he wants to teach the Latter-day Saints how and whom to worship in order to receive the Father’s inheritance:

“I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and

- know how to worship, and
- know what you worship,

that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.”

Interestingly, the etymology of our word “worship” comes from an Old English and West Saxon word that means “condition of being worthy.” We can increase our worship when we increase our worthiness. We then worship more as we become more like our Savior.

Historical Understanding of the Trinity

The Lord’s direction on worship expands our understanding of who God is. This was especially important in a world where the Christian trinity confused God’s essence and purpose. The understanding of the trinity was one of the top three religious topics discussed in the early Nineteenth Century throughout the United States. During the Second Great Awakening, most ministers believed that God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit were one being in a trinity—a “mysterious constitution of the

Godhead.”¹ The Bible was not as clear as the creeds on defining the trinity, so “when we consider the incomprehensible nature of the Godhead, the mysterious character of the doctrine of the Trinity, the exceeding complexity and difficulty of the problem,” we must refer to “the church creeds on the subject.”² Those who did not preach the Trinity were considered heretics. It was in this environment that the Lord revealed the nature of God to Joseph in D&C 93.

Handbook on Whom We Worship

This revelation taught the Saints at least five points where the Lord describes who He is and how we can worship Him.

1. Jesus grew line upon line, grace to grace, as we can (D&C 93:14-17)
2. Premortal life with God included light and truth (D&C 93:21-24, 29)
3. Christ is filled with grace and truth—which is knowledge of the past and future (D&C 93:24)
4. God acts in accordance with Eternal Laws, including agency (D&C 93:30-31)
5. God’s glory stems from light and truth, which is called intelligence (D&C 93:36)

Grace to Grace (D&C 93:13) or Grace for Grace (D&C 93:12, 20)

In the description of the Savior, we learn that he received “grace for grace.” D&C 93:12 insinuates that Jesus received this grace from His Father’s “fulness.” In verse 13, we learn that Jesus also learned or “continued from grace to grace until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:12-13, 20). Interestingly, in John 1:16, “grace for grace” is used, but only in D&C 93 do we see the subtle difference that Jesus grew and progressed with an additional, “grace to grace.” Knowing that Jesus progressed clarifies many misunderstandings across Christianity about our Savior’s nature and character. Unlike some apocalyptic stories, the infant Jesus was not able to stop the mouth of lions and communicate with trees.

The grace associated with humanity is only mentioned with the preposition “for” (D&C 93:20). This may refer to the grace or forgiveness we receive from God when we show grace or forgiveness to

¹ Charles Hodge, “Christianity without Christ,” *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* 18, no. 5 (April 1876): 352-362. The full quote clearly shows Hodge defending his faith with scripture: “Christ says, I am in the Father and the Father in me. I and the Father are one. He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father; and therefore, he that worships the Son, worships the Father. Hence, it is written, ‘Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father,’ but, ‘Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.’ ‘He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.’ It is to be remembered, however, that in the mysterious constitution of the Godhead, the second person of the Trinity is the Logos, the Word, and the Revealer. It is through him that God is known.”

² Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1.478. Hodge devoted a full chapter to the Trinity in his *Systematic Theology*. His seven-point outline demonstrates his exhaustive discussion: 1. Preliminary Remarks; 2. Biblical Form of the Doctrine (What that For is—Scriptural Proof—Progressive. Character of Divine Revelation—Formula of Baptism—Apostolic Benediction); 3. The Transition Period (Necessity for more Definite Statement of the Doctrine—conflict with Error-Gnostics-Platonizers-Origen’s Doctrine-Sabellianism-Arianism); 4. The Church Doctrine as presented by the Council of Nice (Objects for which that Council was convened-Difference of Opinion among the Members of the Council-Semi-Arians-Orthodox-Council of Constantinople-The Athanasian Creed); 5. Points decided by the Councils of Nice and Constantinople (as against Sabellianism-Arians and Semi-Arians-Mutual Relations of the Persons of the Trinity); 6. Examination of the Nicene Doctrine (Subordination-Eternal Generation-Eternal Sonship, Objections urged against the Doctrine of Eternal Sonship, Relation to the Spirit to the other Persons of the Trinity); 7. Philosophical Forms of the Doctrine of the Trinity. Hodge focuses on the Trinity for a chapter in the same volume 1.442-482; as well as pages 84, 92, 106.

others. When we follow the Lord's commandments to forgive our enemies and develop charity for all, He will give us His grace and forgiveness. This word interplay surely has other meanings as well.

Relationship of God and Humanity

Additionally, parallel structures in D&C 93:12-30 connect Jesus and God the Father with humanity. We learn more of His generosity as He shares of His fulness with humanity. For example:

- A. Jesus, our exemplar, carried out His Father's commands, and
- B. Jesus instructs us to follow His commands.
 - A> Then His Father blessed Jesus, and through Jesus' at-one-ment,
 - B> We too may receive Heavenly Father's blessing.
 - a. Jesus developed from grace to grace, and received grace for grace
 - b. We receive grace for grace.

Our God generously shares His fullness with His Son, who then shares it with His disciples.

2. Temple Preparation

As we take a bird's eye view of the theological development of the Lord's revelations from 1829 up to this point in 1833, we see that the Lord began with a guidebook on how to receive personal revelation, the importance of obedience and repentance in order to receive His gift of salvation from sin, other workings of the Spirit, and the resurrection of the dead.

Then in 1832, in D&C 76, the Lord extends our understanding of heaven and exaltation with a vision of the three degrees of glory and much more. Adding in the oath and covenant of the priesthood in D&C 84, the temple preparations and washing of feet in 88, and guidelines to see the Lord's face in D&C 93, we see the Lord teaching the Saints what is required to return into His presence.

When President Brigham Young dedicated the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple on April 6, 1853, he taught the Saints about the role of entering the presence of the Lord in connection with their endowment:

Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell." (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855], 2:31).

In this sense this revelation becomes part of the Saint's preparation to make temple covenants where they will enter God's presence.

Handbook to Enter the Lord's Presence

The Lord begins this revelation with the same promise given in the temple initiatories and endowment. The Lord promises the saints who apply the preparatory steps outlined in D&C 93, that they will receive “a fulness of truth . . . a fulness of joy” (D&C 93:26, 33). The revelation opens with five key steps on what is needed to enter the Lord’s presence (numbers are added):

“Every soul who

1. forsaketh his sins and
2. cometh unto me, and
3. calleth on my name, and
4. obeyeth my voice, and
5. keepeth my commandments,

shall see my face and know that I am.”

The concluding promise can become a motivating source and direction in disciples’ lives.

Ever since President Nelson became our prophet in 2018, he has directed the Saints in the same points—to seek the Spirit continuously, repent, obey God’s commandments, study God’s words, and increase our level of temple worship (see 2018-2021 General Conference Reports).

The purpose of temple worship is to learn what is required to enter the Lord’s presence. For most of us, the fulfilment of D&C 93:1—seeing the Lord’s face—will happen after our mortal probation. Yet, the Lord felt it was important to direct the young Saints in that direction and prepare them. Like Moses who led the children of Israel to Mt. Sinai, the Prophet Joseph was to teach the Saints what was needed to enter into the Lord’s presence.

Elsewhere in scripture, we read of entering the Lord’s presence with an embrace. Nephi describes the Lord’s arms embracing him with love in 2 Nephi 1:15, “The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.”

The embrace echoes the root meaning of the “at-one-ment.” The ancient definition of “at-one-ment / *kaphar*” was described by Professor Hugh Nibley as part of a ritual embrace in Egyptian and other Semitic cultures (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic).

The Arabic *kafara* puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze . . . Most interesting is the Arabic *kafata*, as it is the key to a dramatic situation. It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out . . . ‘I am thy suppliant,’ whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest's shoulder and declare him under his protection” (*Approaching Zion*, 558-559).

The message of worship in section 93 is to become at one with God again or to enter into “His fulness.” (Fulness is repeated fifteen times in D&C 93 and in sixty-five verses across the D&C). This is an important part of the Lord’s message.

Promises for Worship: An Endowment of Power

Starting on January 2, 1831, the Lord repeatedly promised the Saints, “You shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32, 38; 43:16; etc.). Joseph moved forward, anticipating that powerful spiritual outpouring. In January 1836, less than three years after having received D&C 93, Joseph

received part of that endowment of power when he administered the initiatory ordinances. Another part of the endowment of power was given during the dedication of the Kirtland Temple with its powerful spiritual manifestations, visions, and visitations that extended over the week of March 27 to April 3, 1836 (D&C 109-110).

Nine years after the Lord revealed D&C 88 and 93, some of the Saints were prepared enough for Joseph to introduce the temple endowment. A year later, sixty-five Saints (twenty-four of whom were couples) had been initiated into the “Holy Quorum” for those who had received all their temple blessings. We will speak more of this organization of the Relief Society in 1842 and 1843.

Joseph Smith’s Preparation for Temple Worship

A few months before D&C 93, the Lord spoke of the ordinances in the context of worshipping Him; “In the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest” (D&C 84:20). In other words, the ordinances teach about God’s power—His redeeming sacrifice, power and grace. The symbols and ritual of the ordinances cause us to pause and reflect on WHOM we worship, and HOW we can increase our worship of Him (D&C 93:19). Each saving ordinance introduces another level of worship, as we prepare to enter into the Lord’s presence (D&C 93:1). The following table is a sampling of scriptural references to saving ordinances.

Table 1: Scripture Examples of Saving Ordinances

Baptism [s,ize,ized,ing, eth]	(Ps 51:2, 7?)	99	144	75	21
Washing & Anointing & Clothing	Ex 29:4-9; 30:25-26, 30-31 ; Lev 8:12 1 Kgs 1:39; 19:16; Ps 51:2, 7; Isa 1:16;11:5	Eph 6:14-18; Heb 4:8-11; 1 Cor 6:11;2 Cor 1:21; Jn 2:27; Rev 7:14	2 Nephi 4:33; 9:14; 30:11 Jacob 1:9; 3 Ne 12-20	D&C 88:125; 109:35, 53, 80; 124:39, 57, 76, 91; HC 2:379-83	Moses 6:35
Temple Endowment	Gen 32:24-26 Exodus 19:6 ; Isaiah 6; 61:10	Hebrews 9 1 Cor 11:2-11	Alma 12:36;13:16; 16:17; 60:13 3 Ne 12-20	D&C 84:19-21; 105:12, 18, 33; 109:8-22; 124:39; 128:14; 131:2-3	
Sealing of families	Genesis 3:21-25	Luke 20:35	Helaman 10:7; 3 Ne 17:11-17	D&C 1:8-9; 68:12; 110, 131:2; 132:46; 138:48	
Washing Feet	Ex 30:19, 21	Jn 13:1-14;	0	D&C 88:139-41	
Calling and Election, or the Lord’s Rest, or the More Sure Word of Prophecy	Isaiah 6; 11:10	John 7; Eph 1:3; Heb 4:1, 10; 2 Pe 1:10, 16- 19	Jacob 1:7; Mosiah 5:15; Alma 12:26; 13:12, 16; 16:17; 60:13; Eth 3:1- 12; 3 Nephi 27:19; Moro 7:3	D&C 76:53-70; 84:24; 88:3; 101:31; 109:35; 124:124; 131:5-6; 132:7+	Moses 7:21

D&C 93 answers many doctrinal questions about God’s nature and being. Most of the doctrine about our Heavenly Parents—which Joseph discussed at King Follet’s funeral sermon in General Conference 1844—is also introduced in this section. The Lord always prepares His people through His prophet.

Truman Madsen’s Questions and Answers from D&C 93

The philosopher Truman Madsen particularly appreciated the genius of D&C 93. He summarized the section: “[It] defines beginningless beginnings, the interrelationships of truth, of light, of intelligence, of agency, of element, of embodiment, of joy. Every sentence, every word, is freighted with meaning. In one fell swoop it cuts many Gordian knots” (Steve Harper, Making Sense of D&C, 348).

Madsen then recounts some of the great questions that philosophers and theologians have wrestled across the history of record keeping humanity. Each question has an answer that was restored through Joseph in D&C 93 (re-arranged from Truman Madsen, Joseph Smith the Prophet, 33).

1. How can something come from nothing?

Answer: The universe was not created from nothing. “The elements are eternal.”

2. How can Christ have been both absolutely human and absolutely divine at the same time?

Answer: He was not both at the same time. Christ “received not of the fulness at the first, but continued...until he received a fulness.”

3. If man is totally the creation of God, how can he be anything or do anything that he was not divinely pre-caused to do?

Answer: Man is not totally the creation of God. “Intelligence ...was not created or made, neither indeed can be....Behold, here is the agency of man.”

4. How can man be a divine creation and yet be ‘totally depraved?’

Answer: Man is not totally depraved. “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.”

5. What is the relationship of being and beings, the one and the many?

Answer: ‘Being’ is only the collective name of beings, of whom God is one. Truth is knowledge of things (plural), and not, as Plato would have it, of Thing-hood. “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.”

6. How can spirit relate to gross matter?

Answer: “The elements are the tabernacle of God.”

7. Why should man be embodied?

Answer: “Spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fullness of joy.”

8. How is it that people err and abuse the light, if they are naturally susceptible to light and truth?

Answer: People are free; they can be persuaded only if they choose to be. They cannot be compelled. The Socratic thesis that knowledge is virtue (that if you really know the good you will seek it and do it) is mistaken. It is through disobedience and because of the traditions of the fathers that light is taken away from mankind.