

Section 93

In his inimitable way, BYU philosophy professor Truman Madsen related an anecdote during a presentation he gave at the Yale Divinity School. He told of a conversation with some Catholic priests, very learned Jesuits who expressed their inability to conceive of God as an intimate father intent on raising mankind to fully share in his glory and status. Brother Madsen said he told them it was hard for Latter-day Saints to conceive of God as anything other than a concerned father whose work and glory is to exalt all of his willing children.

What does that have to do with section 93? It's about the nature of God as Father, Christ as Son, and his parents as well as chastises Bishop Whitney and the members of the First Presidency, saying they need to be better parents.¹ The Lord explains why he gave the revelation in verse 19: "I give unto you these sayings that you may understand, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness."

The Lord's use of the word *fulness* tells us that we have in section 93 a revelation about exaltation. *Fulness* is used occasionally in the Book of Mormon and early revelations to describe the gospel, but in section 76, the first of the revelations to describe progress beyond simple salvation from sin and death, the word bursts onto the page nine times. In section 93 we hear it fifteen times and sometimes enriched, as

¹ See Source Note, Historical Introduction, and "[Revelation, 6 May 1833 \[D&C 93\]](#)," p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 9, 2020.

in “fulness of truth” (v. 26) or “fulness of joy” (v. 34). Section 93 is an introductory text on how to come into the Lord's presence and become like him.

Section 93 adds *intelligence* to section 88's impressive catalog of synonyms that include light, life, law, power, and glory—most memorably in section 93:36: “The glory of God is intelligence, or in other words, light and truth.” We worship “The Father,” the organizer of eternal elements and intelligent beings whom he designs to inherit his attributes and with them his “fulness of joy.” We worship a God who did not create us *ex nihilo*, or from nothing, but rather from eternally existing element and intelligence (vv. 33–35). We worship a God whose work is to frame worlds and inhabit them with his children, to provide them a sphere in which they can act independently, truly free to do their father's will or their own.

We worship God by choosing of our own free will to receive the intelligence, or light and truth, he offers us, to keep his commandments and therefore receive more truth, more light, more intelligence, until we know all he knows and have become all he is. We worship our Heavenly Father by becoming like him. To emulate him is the highest worship we can offer him. In section 93, Christ holds himself up as the example. “He received not of the fulness at first, but received grace for grace.” He obeyed His Father and grew by degrees of glory “until he received a fulness” (vv. 12–13). In section 93, Christ declares that we have similar potential for growth and godliness (v. 20).

There is an abrupt transition at verse 40 to pragmatic instructions, and the conclusion of the revelation “descend[s] from the heavens into the everyday concerns of Joseph and his friends. The Lord scolds them for not keeping order in their families.”² This part of the revelation is not disconnected from the lofty preceding verses. All of them tell how to raise children and why. God organizes life and provides his children a setting in which they can act freely. He endows them with light, truth, and knowledge to act upon independently, leaving them free to obey or disobey when “that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers” (D&C 93:39).

In section 93, Joseph received God's theology of parenting and a pragmatic commandment to go and do likewise (v. 40). Moreover, since the glory of God is

² Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 210.

intelligence, there is a commandment to worship by learning, by obtaining knowledge as a means to the end that is exaltation. Exalting knowledge comes by obedience to God's light and truth. "He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things" (v. 28).

Professor Madsen cited section 93 as a profound solution to several theological problems:

- How can there something come from nothing? Answer: The universe was not created from nothing. "The elements are eternal."
- 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."
- 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."
- 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."
- 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 Thinghood. "Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come."
- How can spirit relate to gross matter? Answer: "The elements are the tabernacle of God."
- Why should man be embodied? Answer: "Spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy."
- If we begin susceptible to light and truth, how is it that people err and abuse the light? 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.³

That is impressive even for Joseph Smith, the twenty-seven-year-old farmer/revelator whose history casually contextualizes section 93 by saying, “on the 6th [of May 1833] I received the following.”⁴

³ Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989).

⁴ “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 291, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 9, 2020.