
Doctrine and Covenants 121 — O God, Where Art Thou?

Words from a letter written by Joseph Smith while unjustly imprisoned in Liberty Jail, Clay County, Missouri, March 1839 — part of an epistle to the scattered, suffering Church.

This is the heart of the Liberty Jail epistle — the cry of a prophet from the depths of an unjust dungeon, *O God, where art thou?*, and the tender, transforming answer that came back: *My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment.* From that exchange unfolds one of the greatest treatises in all of scripture on the nature of true authority — how the priesthood, and indeed all righteous influence over other souls, can and cannot be exercised.

Hebrew Word Studies

anupokritos (love unfeigned) (ἀνυπόκριτος) — "**unfeigned, without hypocrisy, un-play-acted**" v. 41. "Love unfeigned" renders the Greek anupokritos — literally "un-hypocritical," from hypokrit^{is}, a stage-actor who speaks behind a mask. Paul uses it of real Christian love: "Let love be without dissimulation (anupokritos)" (Rom. 12:9); "charity out of a pure heart... and faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5). The word insists that the love by which priesthood operates cannot be performed or pretended — it must be the genuine article, with no mask, no act, no angle. Section 121 piles up the un-masked virtues: persuasion (not force), gentleness, meekness, kindness, "without hypocrisy, and without guile." Authority that works by heaven's power is authority with the mask off.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Forty-six verses in four movements. The **cry** (vv. 1–6): *O God, where art thou? how long?* The **answer** (vv. 7–25): *peace be unto thy soul; thine afflictions are but a small moment if thou endure it well; the enemies' judgment is reserved.* The **promise of knowledge** (vv. 26–32): *in the dispensation of the fulness of times nothing shall be withheld — as well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river... as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge.* And the **treatise on power** (vv. 33–46): *many called, few chosen; unrighteous dominion is the nature of almost all men; the priesthood operates only by persuasion, gentleness, and love unfeigned, and so flows forever without compulsion.* The architecture is one of the most remarkable in scripture: a descent into the depths of a real dungeon, and an ascent out of it into the highest teaching on how love, not force, is the only authority heaven recognizes.