
Doctrine and Covenants 20 — The Rise of the Church

The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ, composed through Joseph Smith with Oliver Cowdery at Fayette, New York, circa April 1830 (drawing on instructions given in 1829), and read and accepted by unanimous vote at the Church's first conference, 9 June 1830.

This is the founding charter of the Church — its constitution, its first handbook, and the document that the earliest Saints actually voted to accept as the rule of their common life. If Section 19 was the Lord steadying one frightened man, Section 20 is the Lord handing a newborn church its operating instructions.

Hebrew Word Studies

dikaio■ / hagiāz■ — "to justify, declare righteous / to sanctify, make holy" vv. 30–31. Paul's twin verbs for salvation.

dikaio■ is courtroom language — to be acquitted, set right with God (Rom. 5:1). hagiāz■ is temple language — to be set apart, made holy (1 Cor. 6:11, where Paul stacks both: "ye are washed... ye are sanctified... ye are justified"). Section 20 anchors both in grace, then guards both against presumption (v. 32).

anamn■sis — "remembrance; a calling-to-mind that makes present" vv. 75, 77, 79. The word in Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor.

11:24–25 — "this do in remembrance (eis t■n em■n anamn■sin) of me." Not mere recollection but a remembering that re-presents, that brings the remembered one near. The sacrament prayers turn the whole covenant on this verb: "that they may always remember him." To remember, in this sense, is to be re-membered — joined again to the body.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Read straight through, it has the feel of a community talking itself into existence — first remembering its story, then confessing its faith, then agreeing on how it will actually live together. And the order is not accidental: doctrine before duty, the Atonement before the administrative. The Church is told who its Savior is and what He did before it is told a single thing it must do. By the time the duties arrive, they read less like rules and more like the natural shape of a people who have just confessed that Christ was crucified, died, and rose again for them.