

LECTURE 1 (LECTURES ON FAITH)

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 Edition | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith (with Sidney Rigdon)

OVERVIEW

Lecture 1 of the 'Lectures on Faith' (originally part of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants) establishes the theological foundation for early Mormonism's understanding of faith. Unlike the traditional Protestant view of faith as trust in God's finished work, this text defines faith as a metaphysical 'principle of power' and the 'moving cause of all action.' The text argues via logic and scripture that just as humans require faith to plant seeds or perform daily tasks, God used this same principle of faith to frame the worlds. The lecture culminates in the radical theological assertion that faith is an attribute of Deity, without which God would cease to exist. This establishes a continuum between man and God, suggesting that as man increases in faith, he increases in the same power used by the Creator. It utilizes biblical examples (Hebrews 11) alongside Book of Mormon examples (Alma, Brother of Jared) to demonstrate that faith is the mechanism by which all miracles and reality itself are manipulated and upheld.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Paul (referenced as author of Hebrews), Alma (Book of Mormon prophet), Amulek (Book of Mormon missionary), Brother of Jared (Book of Mormon prophet), Joshua, Noah, Abraham

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. FAITH AS THE PRINCIPLE OF POWER

Assertion: Faith is not just trust, but the actual force or power by which the universe was created and is sustained.

"Had it not been for the principle of faith the worlds would never have been framed... it is the principle by which Jehovah works... Take this principle or attribute... from the Deity and he would cease to exist."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, God is the source of all power (Psalm 62:11). He does not 'use' faith to create; He speaks from His own self-sufficiency and authority (Genesis 1). Faith, biblically, is the creature's trust in the Creator (Hebrews 11:1). This text inverts the relationship, suggesting God Himself is dependent on the principle of faith to exist and act. This implies a power higher than God (the principle of faith) or that God is subject to laws of metaphysics that precede Him, violating the doctrine of Aseity (God's self-existence).

2. THEOLOGY AS A REVEALED SCIENCE

Assertion: Theology is a 'science' that treats the being and attributes of God, with faith as its first principle.

"Question.—What is theology? Answer.—It is that revealed science which treats of the being and attributes of God..."

Evangelical Comparison: The text frames theology and faith in mechanistic terms. By calling it a 'science' and analyzing the 'operations of the mind,' the text moves toward a Gnostic or Deistic view where spiritual results are the product of correctly applying laws. Evangelicalism views theology as the knowledge of a Person (John 17:3), where results (fruit) come from abiding in the Vine (John 15), not from mastering a 'principle of action' common to all intelligent beings.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in Theology Proper (the doctrine of God). Evangelicalism holds that God is the 'Unmoved Mover,' possessing all power inherently. He does not 'hope' for things or deal with 'things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1), because all things are naked and open to His eyes (Hebrews 4:13). This text asserts God works by faith, implying He deals with the unseen and requires a mechanism to act. This anthropomorphizes God, dragging Him down to the level of man, differing only in degree of power, not in kind of being. Furthermore, it turns faith into a technology of the spirit—a lever to be pulled for power—rather than a relational reliance on a Sovereign Lord.

Shared Values:

Centrality of faith in the religious life.; Belief in miracles.; Authority of the Bible (specifically Hebrews and Gospels).

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Attributes of God) – Claims God exists by reason of faith and would cease to exist without it.
2. [Major] Creator/Creature Distinction – Posits that God and man operate by the exact same principle (faith) to achieve action, narrowing the gap between Creator and creature.
3. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Frames spiritual blessings as the mechanical result of exerting faith-power, rather than gifts of grace.

Semantic Warnings:

"Faith"

In Text: The principle of power and action in all intelligent beings (including God); a force that frames worlds.

Evangelical: Trust, reliance, and assurance in God's character and promises (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: *In this text: 'By faith the worlds were framed' (God used faith to make them). In Bible: 'By faith we understand that the worlds were framed' (We believe God did it).*

"Righteousness"

In Text: Action and power resulting from faith.

Evangelical: Right standing with God granted by grace through faith in Christ (Romans 3:21-22).

Example: *Text: 'Faith... is the foundation of all righteousness' (because it causes action).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as obtaining the power and blessings associated with righteousness via faith.

How Attained: Through belief and baptism (Mark 16:16 cited), but framed within a system of acquiring power through faith.

Basis of Assurance: The evidence of power/results (miracles, answers).

Comparison to Sola Fide: While emphasizing faith, it is not Sola Fide (faith alone in Christ's work). It is faith as a 'work' or 'exertion' of the mind that generates righteousness. It shifts reliance from the Object of Faith (Jesus) to the Quality of Faith (Power).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Reflect on the history of your life to see faith as the moving cause.
2. Turn thoughts to the operations of the mind.
3. Understand faith as the foundation of all righteousness.

Implicit Obligations:

1. View every action (planting, sowing, asking) as an act of faith.
2. Cultivate faith as a power to perform miracles (move mountains, stop lions).
3. Accept the Book of Mormon accounts as historically equal to Biblical accounts.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism (cited via Mark 16:16 as necessary for salvation).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says faith is the 'evidence of things not seen.' If God has 'faith,' what is it that God has not seen?
2. Does God know the future perfectly? If He does, why would He need 'faith' to act?
3. Hebrews 11:3 says 'By faith WE understand that the worlds were framed.' How does this text conclude that GOD used faith to frame them?
4. If God's existence depends on the principle of faith (as the text says), is the principle of faith greater than God?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Moving Cause – Humans do long for a motivation that spurs true righteousness. The Gospel provides this not through a 'principle' we generate, but through the Holy Spirit indwelling us. [Philippians 2:13 - 'For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Works-Righteousness [Severe] – By defining faith as a power that produces results, the believer bears the burden of any unanswered prayer. If the mountain doesn't move, the text implies it is because the believer failed to generate enough 'faith-power.'
2. Ontological Confusion [Moderate] – The text blurs the line between God and man. If God uses faith just like I do, then God is just a more advanced version of me. This removes the comfort of resting in a Transcendent, Sovereign God who is 'Other' and fully capable.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Rational introspection ('turn their thoughts... to the operations of their own minds') synthesized with proof-texting from expanded scripture.

Verification Method: Self-reflection and logical deduction: 'Reflect, and ask yourselves, if these things are not so.'

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the revelation of God in Christ and Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2), not on analyzing one's own mental operations to understand the nature of Deity. Jeremiah 17:9 warns that the heart is deceitful, making introspection a flawed basis for theological truth.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1835 (published in the first Doctrine and Covenants).

Authorship: Traditionally Joseph Smith; critical scholarship suggests Sidney Rigdon was the primary draftsman under Smith's supervision.

Textual Issues: These lectures were decanonized by the LDS Church in 1921 because the theology (specifically regarding the Godhead in later lectures) contradicted later Mormon developments, though the definition of faith in Lecture 1 remains influential.