

LECTURE 6

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 Edition | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Lecture 6 of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (part of the 'Lectures on Faith') presents a rigorous soteriological argument regarding the relationship between human sacrifice, knowledge, and faith. The text argues that 'mere belief' is insufficient for salvation; rather, a believer must possess 'actual knowledge' that their life is pleasing to God. Crucially, the text posits that this specific knowledge can only be obtained through the 'sacrifice of all things'—including reputation, property, family, and life itself. It establishes a causal chain: one must sacrifice everything to obtain the knowledge of acceptance; this knowledge then produces the faith necessary to lay hold on eternal life. The lecture explicitly states that a religion not requiring the sacrifice of all things lacks the power to save. Furthermore, it introduces a strict psychological binary, asserting that 'doubt and faith do not exist in the same person at the same time,' thereby making absolute certainty a requirement for true faith. This theology shifts the basis of assurance from the finished work of Christ to the intensity of the believer's dedication and sacrifice.

KEY FIGURES

The Saints (Believers), Abel, Jesus Christ, God the Father

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE NECESSITY OF TOTAL SACRIFICE

Assertion: Faith unto salvation cannot exist without the believer sacrificing all earthly things (reputation, family, life).

"Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things, never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the believer is called to a life of sacrifice as a response to the grace already received (Romans 12:1-2). However, Lecture 6 inverts this order, establishing human sacrifice as the mechanism that generates saving faith. The text claims that 'through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life.' This contradicts the evangelical doctrine of Sola Fide, where faith is a gift of God not resulting from works (Ephesians 2:8-9), and Sola Gratia, where salvation is based on Christ's sacrifice, not the believer's.

2. INCOMPATIBILITY OF FAITH AND DOUBT

Assertion: True faith cannot coexist with any degree of doubt; doubt indicates a lack of faith.

"For doubt and faith do not exist in the same person at the same time... where doubt and uncertainty is, there faith is not, nor can it be."

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts a psychological impossibility: 'doubt and faith do not exist in the same person at the same time.' This creates a theology of perfectionism regarding the believer's mental state. In contrast, the New Testament presents faith as trust that can exist alongside struggle. The father in Mark 9:24 cries, 'I believe; help my unbelief,' and is accepted by Jesus. Jude 1:22 instructs believers to 'have mercy on those who doubt.' By defining faith as the total absence of doubt, Lecture 6 places the burden of salvation on the believer's cognitive certainty rather than on the reliability of the Object of faith (Christ).

3. ASSURANCE VIA WORKS

Assertion: Assurance of salvation ('actual knowledge') is obtained only after the believer has offered sufficient sacrifice.

"It is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things, that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God."

Evangelical Comparison: Lecture 6 teaches that assurance is a result of personal merit and extreme obedience. The believer must 'offer unto him the same sacrifice' as the ancients to obtain the same assurance. This is a works-based epistemology of salvation. Evangelicalism teaches that assurance is grounded in the objective work

of Christ and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16), independent of the believer's perfection in sacrificing goods or reputation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental incompatibility lies in the 'Ordo Salutis' (Order of Salvation). Evangelicalism teaches that God's grace precedes and enables faith, which then produces good works (sacrifice). Lecture 6 reverses this, teaching that human sacrifice must precede and produce the 'actual knowledge' required for saving faith. This effectively makes salvation a reward for the believer's extreme dedication rather than a gift of grace received by humble trust. Furthermore, the definition of faith as the total absence of doubt creates a fragile, performance-based spirituality that is alien to the New Testament's comfort for the weak and weary.

Shared Values:

The importance of faith.; The reality of God.; The expectation of persecution for believers.; The existence of eternal life.

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – The text makes faith dependent on the work of 'sacrificing all things,' thereby adding a massive work requirement as a prerequisite for saving faith.
- 2. [Critical] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Salvation is framed as a transaction: the believer offers sacrifice and receives the 'guarantee' of authority to lay hold on eternal life in return.
- 3. [Major] Assurance of Salvation – Assurance is removed from the objective work of Christ and placed on the subjective, fluctuating performance of the believer.

Semantic Warnings:

"Faith"

In Text: A power or principle of action derived from 'actual knowledge' and the absence of doubt, earned through sacrifice.

Evangelical: Trust and reliance on God's character and promises, often amidst weakness (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: In this text, you cannot have faith if you doubt. In the Bible, the man cried 'I believe; help my unbelief' (Mark 9:24).

"Knowledge"

In Text: A spiritual certainty of acceptance earned by the 'sacrifice of all things.'

Evangelical: Cognitive and relational understanding of God's truth revealed in Scripture and Christ.

Example: The text says you must 'know' you are accepted by sacrificing everything. The Bible says we know we are accepted because of Christ's blood (Ephesians 1:6).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Obtaining 'eternal life' and being a 'partaker of the glory of God' (Exaltation).

How Attained: By offering the 'sacrifice of all things' -> obtaining 'actual knowledge' of acceptance -> exercising 'faith' -> enduring to the end.

Basis of Assurance: Subjective knowledge gained through personal sacrifice.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. The text states: 'unless they in like manner offer unto him the same sacrifice... they cannot lay hold upon eternal life.' (v8). Compare to Romans 4:5: 'However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Sacrifice all things (character, reputation, honor, houses, lands, family, life).
- 2. Commit the whole lecture to memory (per the concluding note).

Implicit Obligations:

1. Eliminate all doubt from one's mind.
2. Constantly evaluate if one's current level of sacrifice is sufficient to warrant divine acceptance.
3. Endure persecution and loss of goods joyfully as proof of faith.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Making a 'covenant by sacrifice' (alluding to Psalm 50:5).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. According to this lecture, can you have faith if you have any doubts? How does that match your experience?
2. The text says we must sacrifice 'all things' to know we are accepted. How do you know when you have sacrificed enough to be accepted?
3. If assurance depends on our sacrifice, what happens on the days we fail or struggle?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Assurance – Humans deeply desire to know they are right with God. Lecture 6 seeks this through self-sacrifice. [Romans 8:16 - The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. (Assurance is a gift, not a wage).]
2. Covenant by Sacrifice – The text applies this to the believer's sacrifice. The Gospel points to Christ as the ultimate sacrifice who cut the covenant for us. [Hebrews 10:12-14 - But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God... For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Works-Righteousness / Perfectionism [Severe] – The believer is burdened with the impossible task of sacrificing 'all things' perfectly to earn God's favor. Any withheld item or affection blocks salvation.
2. The Anxiety of Doubt [Severe] – By defining faith as the total absence of doubt, the text condemns the believer's natural questions or struggles as a sign they are lost/faithless.
3. Uncertainty of Salvation [Moderate] – Since the requirement is 'all things,' the believer can never be truly sure they haven't held something back, leading to chronic spiritual insecurity.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Experiential knowledge derived from personal action (sacrifice).

Verification Method: The internal removal of doubt and the feeling of assurance that comes only after sacrificing everything.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology grounds truth in God's revealed Word (John 17:17). This text grounds 'knowledge' of salvation in the believer's performance. In the Bible, we know we are saved because God promised it to those who believe (1 John 5:11-13), not because we have successfully sacrificed all possessions.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1835

Authorship: Traditionally Joseph Smith; critical scholarship often attributes the Lectures on Faith largely to Sidney Rigdon, though approved and delivered by Smith.

Textual Issues: The Lectures on Faith (including Lecture 6) were canonized as the 'Doctrine' part of the 'Doctrine and Covenants' in 1835 but were decanonized/removed by the LDS Church in 1921. However, they remain historically significant for understanding early Mormon theology.