

SECTION 11 (MODERN D&C 35)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally dictated in December 1830 and cataloged as Section 11 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 35 in modern editions), marks a pivotal transition in early Mormon history. It is addressed to Sidney Rigdon, a prominent Campbellite minister who had recently converted to Mormonism. The text serves two primary theological functions: First, it recontextualizes Rigdon's past ministry. While acknowledging his work was 'prepared' by God like John the Baptist's, the text explicitly invalidates the efficacy of his previous baptisms regarding the gift of the Holy Ghost, asserting that true spiritual power is now exclusively vested in the new restoration authority. Second, it establishes the administrative and theological hierarchy. Rigdon is commanded to serve as a scribe for Joseph Smith ('thou shalt write for him'), specifically for the 'translation' of the Bible (the JST). The text asserts that the 'fulness of the gospel' is found only through Joseph Smith's administration. It contains a notable conditional prophecy regarding Joseph Smith's standing ('if he abide in me'), suggesting that at this early stage, the prophetic office was viewed as contingent upon faithfulness, though the keys were currently exclusive to Smith.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, John the Baptist, Elijah

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. EXCLUSIVITY OF PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY

Assertion: Christian baptisms performed outside the restoration authority (like Rigdon's Campbellite baptisms) are insufficient for conveying the Holy Ghost.

"Thou didst baptize by water unto repentance, but they received not the Holy Ghost; but now I give unto thee a commandment, that thou shalt baptize by water, and they shall receive the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the validity of baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit are rooted in the believer's faith and the promise of God (Ephesians 1:13), not the ecclesiastical lineage of the baptizer. This text asserts a 'Donatist-like' view where the efficacy of the ordinance depends strictly on the specific authority held by Joseph Smith and his designates. It explicitly bifurcates water baptism and the reception of the Spirit, claiming the latter was absent in Rigdon's previous Christian ministry.

2. OPEN CANON AND REVISIONISM

Assertion: New scriptures are being revealed through Joseph Smith that are necessary for the salvation of the elect.

"And the scriptures shall be given even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect"

Evangelical Comparison: The text commands Rigdon to write for Smith, referring to the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible. It claims these new scriptures come from 'mine own bosom,' implying they possess a higher or more immediate authority than the existing biblical text. This directly challenges the Evangelical doctrine of the sufficiency and closure of the biblical canon (Jude 1:3, Revelation 22:18-19).

3. PROPHETIC CENTRALITY

Assertion: The 'fulness of the gospel' is sent exclusively through Joseph Smith.

"I have sent forth the fulness of my gospel by the hand of my servant Joseph... I have given unto him the keys of the mystery"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals view the 'fulness of the gospel' as the message of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), this text redefines 'fulness' as the specific restoration of keys, covenants, and mysteries revealed through Smith. It establishes Smith as the necessary mediator through whom the 'mystery of those things which have been sealed' is accessed.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mediation of grace. Evangelicalism posits that the veil is torn and believers have direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 4:16). This text reconstructs the veil, placing Joseph Smith and his priesthood authority as necessary gatekeepers. It explicitly states that previous Christian ordinances (represented by Rigdon's ministry) were devoid of the Holy Ghost, thereby unchurching all of Christendom. Salvation is no longer Sola Fide but requires specific ritual obedience to a new ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Shared Values:

Belief in Jesus as Son of God; Necessity of the Holy Ghost; Expectation of the Second Coming; God uses the 'weak' to confound the wise

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Denies the priesthood of all believers by asserting only Joseph's authorized agents can convey the Holy Ghost.
- 2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Makes the reception of the Holy Ghost dependent on a ritual (laying on of hands) by a specific authority, rather than faith.
- 3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the production of new, binding scripture through Joseph Smith.
- 4. [Major] Christology (Mediatorship) – Inserts Joseph Smith as a necessary secondary mediator for the 'fulness' of the gospel.

Semantic Warnings:

"Fulness of the Gospel"

In Text: The restoration of priesthood keys, authority, and new revelations through Joseph Smith.
Evangelical: The complete sufficiency of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).
Example: *In this text, 'receiving the fulness' means joining the Mormon church; in the Bible, it refers to the blessings available in Christ.*

"Scriptures"

In Text: New revelations coming from God's bosom through Joseph Smith (including the JST).
Evangelical: The closed canon of the Old and New Testaments.
Example: *The text promises 'scriptures shall be given,' indicating an open canon.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as participation in the 'fulness of the gospel' and being numbered among the 'elect' who receive the new scriptures.

How Attained: Through faith in Christ PLUS baptism by authority, reception of the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands, and enduring with the Prophet.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tied to the 'miracles, signs and wonders' and the internal witness of the Comforter, but is conditional on obedience.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly states 'without faith shall not any thing be shown forth,' which sounds like Sola Fide, but immediately couples it with the necessity of the new ordinances and the 'fulness' sent through Joseph, effectively creating a 'Faith + Authority + Ordinances' model.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Listen to the voice of the Lord
- 2. Baptize by water
- 3. Lay on hands for the Holy Ghost
- 4. Watch over Joseph Smith

5. Write for Joseph Smith (scribe)
6. Tarry with Joseph Smith
7. Preach the gospel
8. Call on holy prophets to prove Joseph's words

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the invalidity of previous Christian experiences
2. Submit to Joseph Smith's leadership as the holder of keys
3. Believe in the new scriptures being produced

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by proper authority
2. Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, the Lord tells Sidney Rigdon that his previous baptisms didn't convey the Holy Ghost. Does this mean you believe no Christians outside the LDS church have the Holy Spirit?
2. Verse 4 mentions that if Joseph Smith did not 'abide' in Christ, God would plant another in his stead. How do you determine if a prophet is abiding in Christ?
3. The text says the 'weak things' will thresh the nations. How does this compare to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians that God uses the weak to point to Christ, rather than to a new priesthood authority?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The longing for 'Greater Work' – Sidney Rigdon wanted more than dry religion; he wanted power. The Gospel offers the true power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16) without the need for new hierarchies. [John 14:12]
2. God using the 'Weak Things' – This acknowledges human frailty. The Gospel answer is that God's grace is sufficient in weakness, pointing to Christ's strength, not a prophet's authority. [2 Corinthians 12:9]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Intermediation/Hierarchy [Severe] – The believer is told that their direct connection to God is insufficient without the authorized priesthood. This creates a dependency on the institution for access to the Spirit.
2. Invalidation of Past Experience [Moderate] – Converts are told their previous spiritual experiences (like Sidney's) were void of the Holy Ghost, causing doubt about their own spiritual history and ability to discern truth.
3. Uncertainty/Conditional Prophecy [Moderate] – The text implies the leader (Joseph) could fail ('if not, another will I plant'). For the early saint, this creates anxiety about the stability of the movement's foundation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Vertical revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Verification Method: Internal spiritual confirmation ('Comforter') contingent upon accepting the Prophet's output.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology tests new claims against the fixed standard of the Bible (Acts 17:11). This text requires the Bible to be interpreted/corrected by the new claims, reversing the testing standard.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was later canonized as D&C 35. The 1835 version (Section 11) shows the formalization of the revelation. The conditional prophecy regarding Joseph ('if he abide in me') is significant, as later theology made the prophetic office more absolute.