

SECTION 25 (MODERN SECTION 67)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally Section 25 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (now Section 67), addresses a specific historical crisis of confidence among the early elders regarding the language of Joseph Smith's revelations. Some elders, educated and articulate, felt the language of the commandments was inferior or lacked divine grandeur. In response, the text issues a divine challenge: select the 'wisest' among them to write a commandment 'like unto' the least of Joseph's. If they fail to replicate the prophetic voice, they are logically bound to testify of the divine origin of Smith's revelations. Furthermore, the text pivots to a high-stakes spiritual promise: the 'vail' can be rent, allowing the elders to see God in the flesh, provided they strip themselves of jealousies, fears, and become 'perfected.' This establishes a theology where theophany (seeing God) is contingent upon personal worthiness and humility, rather than solely on sovereign grace.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Joseph Smith, Jr., The Elders of the Church (specifically William E. McLellin, implied)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE TEST OF REPLICATION

Assertion: The divine authenticity of scripture is proven by the inability of man to mimic its composition.

"if there be any among you, that shall make one like unto it, then ye are justified in saying that ye do not know that they are true"

Evangelical Comparison: This text establishes a unique epistemological test: the 'Prophetic Challenge.' It asserts that if a human cannot write a text that 'sounds' or 'feels' like Joseph Smith's revelations, then Smith's text must be divine. Evangelical theology rejects this subjective literary test. A text could be unique, profound, or difficult to mimic (like Shakespeare or the Quran) without being divinely inspired scripture. For Evangelicals, the test of a prophet is 100% accuracy (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) and doctrinal consistency with the closed canon of Scripture (Galatians 1:8-9), not the literary prowess of the writer.

2. CONDITIONAL THEOPHANY

Assertion: Believers can and should see God in the flesh if they strip themselves of sin and are sufficiently humble.

"inasmuch as you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears... the vail shall be rent and you shall see me"

Evangelical Comparison: The text promises a literal viewing of God ('see me and know that I am') as a result of personal purification ('strip yourselves'). Evangelical theology maintains that God is Spirit (John 4:24) and dwells in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). While the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8), this is primarily eschatological (in the future glory) or spiritual (perception of His work). This text suggests a 'here and now' visual verification based on the believer's merit ('worthiness'), which contradicts the evangelical emphasis on faith in the unseen Christ (1 Peter 1:8).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of revelation and the accessibility of God. This text defends the expansion of the canon through Joseph Smith by issuing a challenge that shifts the burden of proof to the critic's literary ability. Theologically, it introduces a 'merit-based mysticism' where the believer's ability to see God is contingent on their ability to 'strip' themselves of sin and become 'perfected.' Evangelicalism asserts that we have access to the Father solely through the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19), not through our own stripping of jealousy or perfection, and that we walk by faith, not by the sight of God's face.

Shared Values:

God hears prayers.; God knows the hearts of men.; Righteousness comes from God.; Humility is a virtue.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new, binding commandments outside the Bible.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Suggests access to God's presence is earned through personal stripping of sin and perfection.
3. [Major] Theology Proper – Implies God is an object to be visually inspected by men in the flesh.

Semantic Warnings:

"Perfected"

In Text: A state of personal holiness and worthiness required to abide God's presence.

Evangelical: Often refers to maturity (teleios) or the imputed righteousness of Christ, not a sinless state achieved by effort in this life (Philippians 3:12).

"See me"

In Text: Literal visual perception of God's body/person.

Evangelical: Often metaphorical for spiritual understanding, or reserved for the eschaton (1 John 3:2).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to 'seeing and knowing' God and being 'perfected'.

How Attained: Through humility, stripping of sin, patience, and worthiness.

Basis of Assurance: Visual confirmation (seeing God) and the internal testimony of the truth of the revelations.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text commands 'continue in patience until ye are perfected' to see God. Evangelicalism teaches we are 'perfected for all time' by Christ's offering (Hebrews 10:14) regarding our standing, though we grow in sanctification.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Seek out the least commandment from the book.
2. Appoint the wisest man to attempt to write a commandment like it.
3. Testify that the commandments are true if unable to replicate them.
4. Strip yourselves from jealousies and fears.
5. Humble yourselves before the Lord.
6. Continue in patience until perfected.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's language despite his 'imperfections'.
2. Believe that spiritual failure (not seeing God) is the result of personal lack of humility.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination to the ministry (mentioned as a prerequisite for the promise).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, it says if you strip yourself of fears and are humble, you will see God. Have you seen God?
2. If you haven't seen God yet, does this verse imply you are not yet sufficiently humble?
3. How do you interpret the command to 'continue in patience until ye are perfected'? Is that perfection something you achieve, or something Christ achieved for you?
4. The text challenges men to write a commandment 'like unto' Joseph's. Do you think the truth of a message depends on how hard it is to mimic the writing style?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Veil – The text expresses a longing for the veil to be removed. In the Gospel, the veil of the temple WAS rent when Christ died (Matthew 27:51). [Hebrews 10:19-20 - We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, his flesh.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Shame [Severe] – The text links the absence of a miraculous experience (seeing God) to the believer's lack of humility and failure to 'strip' themselves of sin. This creates a burden where the believer feels constantly 'insufficiently humble' because they have not yet had the promised theophany.
2. Intellectual Suppression [Moderate] – The text frames critical evaluation of the scripture's language as a spiritual flaw ('fears in your hearts'). It forces the adherent to suppress rational critique of the text's quality under threat of condemnation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Pragmatic Experimentation (trying to write a revelation) and Mystical Experience (seeing God).

Verification Method: Adherents verify the text by failing to replicate it, and verify God by personal purification leading to sight.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit illuminating the written Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-13), not through a 'challenge' to write scripture or a demand for visual manifestation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: November 1831 (Published in 1835 D&C).

Authorship: Joseph Smith, Jr.

Textual Issues: This section was given during the conference where the 'Book of Commandments' was being prepared. The challenge in verse 2 was a direct response to William E. McLellin attempting to write a revelation and failing.