

SECTION 31

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, known in modern Latter-day Saint editions as Section 4, is foundational to Mormon missiology. Delivered in February 1829 to Joseph Smith's father, it announces the commencement of a 'marvellous work'—the Restoration of the gospel and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The text utilizes agricultural metaphors ('field is white already to harvest') to instill a sense of urgency. Theologically, it is significant because it establishes a covenantal framework for service: the adherent is commanded to serve with 'all' their heart, might, mind, and strength. In exchange for this total devotion, the text promises that the laborer 'bringeth salvation to his soul.' This creates a distinct soteriological model where active participation in the institutional growth of the church (the harvest) is a prerequisite for standing 'blameless before God.' It lists specific character qualifications—faith, virtue, knowledge, etc.—mirroring 2 Peter 1, but framing them as requirements for the priesthood laborer rather than solely as fruits of the Spirit.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Joseph Smith Sr. (The Recipient), The Laborer (The Idealized Missionary)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SALVATION THROUGH SERVICE

Assertion: Active labor in the 'harvest' (missionary work) is the mechanism by which one secures their own salvation.

"he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might... bringeth salvation to his soul"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, good works and evangelism are the *result* of salvation (Ephesians 2:10), not the *cause* of it. This text inverts that order, suggesting that the act of 'thrusting in the sickle' is what 'bringeth salvation to his soul.' This implies that salvation is a cooperative effort where the believer's 'might' in service is a contributing factor to their eternal security. It shifts the focus from Christ's finished work on the cross to the believer's ongoing work in the field.

2. THE MARVELLOUS WORK

Assertion: A new dispensation or divine intervention is beginning that is distinct from previous Christian history.

"a marvellous work is about to come forth among the children of men"

Evangelical Comparison: The phrase 'marvellous work' (referencing Isaiah 29:14) is interpreted in Mormonism as the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the church. For Evangelicals, the 'marvellous work' of God was definitively accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The claim that a new work is 'about to come forth' in 1829 suggests that the Gospel had been lost or was insufficient prior to Joseph Smith, violating the concept of the church's continuity (Matthew 16:18).

3. CONDITIONAL BLAMELESSNESS

Assertion: Standing blameless before God is contingent upon serving with total capacity (heart, might, mind, strength).

"serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day"

Evangelical Comparison: This text establishes a legalistic framework for judgment. The condition clause ('that ye may...') links the status of being 'blameless' directly to the intensity of the adherent's service. In contrast, Evangelical theology teaches that a believer is presented faultless before the throne (Jude 1:24) because they are clothed in Christ's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21), regardless of the intensity of their personal ministry output.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental incompatibility lies in the function of 'works.' In this text, the 'sickle' (work) is the instrument that 'bringeth salvation to his soul.' This is a transactional soteriology: the believer gives their 'might,' and God grants salvation/blamelessness. Evangelical theology asserts Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) through Sola Fide (Faith Alone). Works are the fruit, not the root. By conditioning 'blamelessness' at the 'last day' on the totality of one's service ('all your heart, might...'), the text places the burden of justification on the shoulders of the sinner, rather than on the shoulders of the Savior.

Shared Values:

Desire to serve God; Importance of virtues (faith, hope, charity, love); Urgency of evangelism; Prayer (Ask and ye shall receive)

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is explicitly linked to the work of 'thrusting in the sickle' and serving with all might.
- 2. [Major] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – The text implies Christ's work is insufficient to make one blameless without the addition of the believer's 'all' in service.
- 3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new authoritative revelation necessary for the 'marvellous work' of the last days.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: A state achieved or secured through active labor ('thrusting in the sickle') and total devotion.
Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death, accomplished solely by Christ and received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).
Example: *In D&C 31:1, the missionary brings salvation to his own soul by working; in Titus 3:5, God saves us 'not by works of righteousness which we have done.'*

"Blameless"

In Text: A status earned by serving with all heart, might, mind, and strength.
Evangelical: A legal standing granted by the imputation of Christ's righteousness (Colossians 1:22).
Example: *The text says serve 'that ye may stand blameless'; the Bible says we are 'justified freely by his grace' (Romans 3:24).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: A state of being 'blameless' and 'saved' which is the result of active participation in the Restoration.

How Attained: By 'thrusting in the sickle' (works) and serving with 'all' capacity.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is found in the knowledge that one is working hard ('with his might').

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. The text says labor 'bringeth salvation to his soul.' Romans 4:4-5 says, 'Now to the one who works, his wage is not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Serve God with all heart, might, mind, and strength
- 2. Thrust in the sickle with might
- 3. Ask and knock
- 4. Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, etc.

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Engage in missionary work to secure personal salvation

2. Cultivate specific character traits to remain qualified for ministry
3. Accept the 'marvellous work' (Restoration) as the primary vehicle for service

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly mentioned in this specific text, though 'service' implies priesthood duties in broader context

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says we must serve with 'all' our heart, might, mind, and strength to be blameless. How do you determine when you have truly given 'all'?
2. Verse 1 says that thrusting in the sickle 'bringeth salvation to his soul.' Do you feel your salvation depends on how hard you work for the church?
3. If you were unable to serve due to illness or incapacity, would you still be 'blameless' before God according to this standard?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire to be Blameless – Everyone fears judgment and wants to be found innocent. The text offers innocence through hard labor. [Jude 1:24 - 'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.']
2. The Harvest – Jesus also spoke of the harvest, but He sent laborers to gather what *He* had sown. [John 4:36-38 - We enter into the labor of others (Christ and the prophets), reaping the fruit of Christ's work, not establishing our own righteousness.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism / Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The command to serve with 'all' heart, might, mind, and strength creates an impossible standard. The believer can never truly know if they have given 'all,' leading to chronic guilt and a sense of inadequacy.
2. Conditional Security [Moderate] – Because salvation is linked to the active 'thrusting in of the sickle,' the believer's eternal security is tied to their current level of activity. Stopping the work implies risking the soul.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Internal desire and external revelation.

Verification Method: The presence of 'desires to serve God' is the verification that one is 'called to the work.'

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical calling is often external and confirmed by the church body and alignment with Scripture (1 Timothy 3), whereas this text validates the call through subjective internal desire and adherence to the new revelation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text (Section 31 in 1835 edition) became Section 4 in modern editions. It is one of the earliest revelations, predating the organization of the church.