

SECTION 33

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

OVERVIEW

This text, originally received in April 1829 and canonized as Section 33 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 7 in modern editions), purports to be a translation of an ancient parchment written and hidden by John the Beloved. The revelation addresses a debate between Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery regarding the fate of the Apostle John based on John 21:20-23. In this account, Jesus grants John's request to have 'power over death' and remain on earth to bring souls unto Christ until the Second Coming. The text contrasts John's desire with Peter's desire to speedily enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus declares John's desire to be a 'greater work.' The text establishes the concept of 'translated beings' in Mormon theology—humans who do not taste death but remain in a terrestrial state to minister. Crucially, this 1835 version includes theological expansions not present in earlier manuscripts, specifically regarding the 'keys of this ministry' held by Peter, James, and John, solidifying the restoration of Priesthood authority.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, John the Beloved, Peter, James, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TRANSLATION OF TRANSLATED BEINGS

Assertion: John the Apostle did not die but was granted power over death to remain on earth ministering until the Second Coming.

"Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee... thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine introduces a category of human existence known as 'translated beings'—individuals who bypass physical death to perform ministry on earth. Evangelical theology maintains that death is the result of the Fall and the gateway to judgment or glory (Hebrews 9:27). While Enoch and Elijah were taken up, the New Testament gives no indication this category continues for Christian apostles. Furthermore, John 21:23 specifically records a correction to the rumor that John would not die: 'Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to thee?' This text directly contradicts the biblical clarification by asserting John ***did*** ask for and receive exemption from death.

2. RESTORATION OF PRIESTHOOD KEYS

Assertion: Peter, James, and John hold specific 'keys of this ministry' to administer salvation.

"I will make thee to minister for him and for thy brother James: and unto you three I will give this power and the keys of this ministry until I come."

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts a hierarchical structure where Peter, James, and John possess unique 'keys' required for the ministry of salvation. In Evangelical theology, the 'keys of the kingdom' (Matthew 16:19) represent the authority of the Gospel message itself, accessible to the entire church, not a metaphysical authorization passed through a specific lineage or restored by apparition. This doctrine lays the foundation for the LDS claim that Joseph Smith received these keys from the resurrected apostles, thereby invalidating all other Christian ministry.

3. SUPERIORITY OF WORKS OVER BEATIFIC VISION

Assertion: Desiring to stay on earth to work is 'greater' than desiring to go immediately to be with Jesus.

"I say unto thee, Peter, this was a good desire, but my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work... therefore, I will make him as flaming fire"

Evangelical Comparison: The text creates a hierarchy of holiness where missionary activity (works) is valued above immediate union with God (grace/rest). While Evangelicals value evangelism, the ultimate goal of the Christian life is union with Christ. Paul explicitly states in Philippians 1:23 that departing to be with Christ is 'far better' than remaining in the flesh, though remaining may be more ***necessary*** for others. This text

shifts the value system, suggesting that the desire to work merits a higher reward or status ('greater work') than the desire for heaven.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the sufficiency of Scripture and the nature of apostolic authority. By claiming to translate a lost document that contradicts the plain reading of the New Testament (John 21), Joseph Smith places his revelatory authority above the biblical text. Furthermore, the introduction of 'keys' held by Peter, James, and John serves as the retro-active theological justification for the exclusive authority claims of the LDS Church, denying the universal priesthood of believers accepted by Evangelicals.

Shared Values:

Zeal for evangelism (bringing souls to Christ).; Belief in the Second Coming.; Recognition of Peter, James, and John as key apostles.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new words to the mouth of Jesus and John not found in the Bible, effectively reopening the canon.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where access to God's power is mediated through specific 'keys' held by a select few.
3. [Minor] Theology Proper (Eschatology) – Claims a human has lived on earth for 2,000 years, contradicting Hebrews 9:27.
4. [Moderate] Sola Fide / Grace – Subtly elevates the 'work' of ministry above the 'rest' of being with Christ.

Semantic Warnings:

"Keys"

In Text: Literal, transferable authorization to administer ordinances and direct the church.

Evangelical: Metaphorical authority of the Gospel message to open the kingdom of heaven to believers (Matthew 16:19).

Example: *In this text, keys are a 'power' given to three men; in Evangelicalism, keys are the proclamation of the Gospel.*

"Ministering Angel"

In Text: A human being (John) who has been transformed to serve on earth without dying.

Evangelical: A distinct order of created beings (Hebrews 1:14), not transformed humans.

Example: *John is made a 'ministering angel' in D&C 7; Biblically, humans will judge angels (1 Cor 6:3), not become them.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as being an 'heir of salvation' (v2), facilitated by those holding keys.

How Attained: Through the ministry of those with keys (Peter, James, John).

Basis of Assurance: Performance of 'greater works' and alignment with priesthood keys.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the 'work' of the ministry and the 'keys' required to administer it, shifting focus away from simple faith in Christ's finished work.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. None explicitly directed at the reader, but the text validates the desire to 'bring souls unto thee' as the highest good.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's authority to translate hidden ancient documents.
2. Believe in the physical continuation of John the Apostle on earth.
3. Acknowledge the specific authority (keys) of Peter, James, and John.

Ritual Requirements:

1. None in this specific text, though 'keys' implies authorized rituals.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read John 21:23 in the Bible, it says Jesus 'did not say to him that he would not die.' How do you reconcile that with D&C 7 which says John asked for power over death and received it?
2. Why do you think the 1833 version of this revelation didn't mention Peter, James, and John holding 'keys,' but the 1835 version does?
3. In Philippians 1:23, Paul says departing to be with Christ is 'far better.' Why does this text say staying to work is 'greater'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire to Save Souls – This reflects the heart of the Great Commission. Just as John longed to see people saved, Christ died so that 'whosoever believes in him should not perish.' [Matthew 28:19-20]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The text subtly categorizes the desire for heaven/rest as 'lesser' than the desire for work. This creates a culture where members feel guilty for desiring rest or assurance, driving them toward endless activity to prove their worthiness.
2. Epistemological Uncertainty [Severe] – By claiming the Bible is incomplete and that hidden parchments exist, the believer loses the stability of a fixed canon. They become dependent on the modern prophet to reveal what is 'really' true, creating a dependency on human authority.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Mystical translation/Revelation given to a modern prophet.

Verification Method: Internal spiritual witness (Moroni 10:4-5 principle) and trust in Joseph Smith's prophetic gift.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective, historical text of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16) and proper exegesis. This text relies on a subjective claim of a hidden document that cannot be historically verified.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1829 (Original reception); 1835 (Publication of this expanded version).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (claimed translation of John).

Textual Issues: Significant redaction. The 1833 Book of Commandments version (Chapter 6) contains only 146 words. This 1835 version contains 252 words. The added material (verses 2-3 in modern versification) introduces the 'keys of the ministry' and 'ministering angel' concepts which were not in the original 1829 text. This is an anachronism, inserting 1834-era theology back into an 1829 document.