

SECTION 34

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given in April 1829 and cataloged as Section 34 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 8 in modern editions), addresses Oliver Cowdery's desire to translate the Book of Mormon plates alongside Joseph Smith. The text establishes a pneumatological framework for Mormonism, defining revelation as the Holy Ghost speaking to the 'mind and in your heart.' It draws a typological link between this subjective experience and the power Moses used to part the Red Sea. Furthermore, the text validates Oliver Cowdery's use of a physical instrument—termed the 'gift of Aaron' (historically identified as a divining rod)—promising that through faith, this gift will allow him to unlock 'mysteries' and translate ancient engravings. The text places the burden of miraculous efficacy squarely on the faith of the practitioner, warning that without faith, nothing can be accomplished.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Oliver Cowdery (Recipient), Moses (Typological Example), Aaron (Typological Example)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SUBJECTIVE REVELATION (MIND AND HEART)

Assertion: The Holy Ghost functions by telling the believer things in their mind and heart, constituting the 'Spirit of Revelation.'

"I will tell you in your mind and in your heart by the Holy Ghost... behold this is the Spirit of Revelation"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit illuminates the mind to understand the written Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-13), but the Spirit does not provide new canonical revelation that supplements or supersedes Scripture. This text defines revelation as a subjective, internal experience ('mind and heart'). This epistemology shifts the locus of authority from the external text of the Bible to the internal experience of the believer, creating a framework where feelings can validate truth claims, a concept often called the 'burning in the bosom' in later LDS theology.

2. THE GIFT OF AARON (DIVINATION)

Assertion: Oliver Cowdery possesses a specific 'gift of Aaron' that he holds in his hands to perform marvelous works and uncover mysteries.

"you have another gift, which is the gift of Aaron... you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works"

Evangelical Comparison: The text refers to the 'gift of Aaron' which Oliver is told he will 'hold in [his] hands.' Historical analysis confirms this refers to a divining rod (the 1833 Book of Commandments explicitly called it the 'rod of nature'). While the 1835 text attempts to biblicalize the practice by invoking Aaron (likely referencing Aaron's rod), the functional description remains one of using a physical object to access divine knowledge. Evangelical theology views this as a form of divination, strictly forbidden in the Old Testament and incompatible with the New Testament mediation of Christ.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of revelation and the tools of the faith. Evangelicalism posits that God speaks primarily through His Son and the closed canon of Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2). This text reopens the canon and introduces a 'technology' of revelation that includes both subjective impressions and physical divination tools. Furthermore, the text conditions the efficacy of God's power on the user's faith in a way that suggests a mechanistic view of grace—if the lever of faith is pulled hard enough, the result is guaranteed. This contrasts with the Biblical view of God's sovereignty, where He answers prayers according to His will, not merely the intensity of the petitioner's faith.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Holy Spirit; Necessity of faith; God as Redeemer; Reverence for Moses and Aaron

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Establishes extra-biblical revelation and subjective feelings as authoritative.
2. [Major] Theology Proper – Attributes the power of the Holy Spirit to a divination tool (rod), confusing the Creator's power with created objects.
3. [Major] Sola Fide – While mentioning faith, it frames faith as a work or mechanism to achieve power/translation rather than trust in Christ for salvation.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gift of Aaron"

In Text: A physical object (divining rod) held in the hand to access divine knowledge.

Evangelical: The Priesthood office or lineage of Aaron; never a physical object for divination.

Example: *In this text, the 'Gift of Aaron' is something Oliver holds to translate; in the Bible, Aaron's rod budded to prove authority but was not a tool for general divination.*

"Mysteries"

In Text: Hidden knowledge contained in ancient records requiring translation.

Evangelical: Truths once hidden but now fully revealed in Christ (Colossians 1:26).

Example: *The text seeks 'mysteries' as new information; the Gospel proclaims the 'mystery' of Christ as a revealed fact.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to 'deliverance' from enemies and 'destruction' of the soul.

How Attained: Through applying the Spirit of Revelation and keeping commandments.

Basis of Assurance: The successful operation of spiritual gifts and protection from enemies.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes faith as a power source for works (translation/miracles) rather than the instrument of justification. Romans 4:5 contrasts with this by showing faith is counted for righteousness to the one who does *not* work.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Ask in faith
2. Keep my commandments
3. Apply unto [the Spirit of Revelation]
4. Doubt not
5. Trifle not with these things
6. Do not ask for that which you ought not

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept internal impressions as the voice of God
2. Use the 'gift of Aaron' (rod) for spiritual inquiry
3. Seek to translate ancient records

Ritual Requirements:

1. Holding the 'gift' in one's hands to perform works

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text mentions a 'gift of Aaron' that Oliver Cowdery would 'hold in his hands.' What do you think that object was?
2. How do you distinguish between the 'Spirit of Revelation' described here (mind and heart) and your own internal thoughts or emotions?
3. If faith is required to translate or perform miracles, how does one deal with the burden when those miracles don't happen? Does that mean the person lacked faith?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for direct guidance – Humans have a natural longing to hear from God. In the Gospel, God has spoken fully and finally in Jesus. [Hebrews 1:1-2]
2. Deliverance from enemies – We face the ultimate enemy of sin and death. Christ provides deliverance not through a rod, but through the cross. [Colossians 1:13-14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Faith Pressure [Severe] – The text links the ability to perform miracles and receive truth directly to the quality of the adherent's faith ('without faith you can do nothing'). This creates a psychological burden where any unanswered prayer or lack of spiritual experience is interpreted as a personal failure of faith.
2. Subjective Uncertainty [Moderate] – By defining truth as an impression in the 'mind and heart,' the believer is left to constantly second-guess whether a thought is from God, themselves, or another source, leading to anxiety and lack of assurance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective internal impression ('mind and heart') and instrumental divination ('gift of Aaron').

Verification Method: Asking in faith with an honest heart and observing the results (deliverance, knowledge).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the objective standard of Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text suggests that faith and internal impression are the primary verification methods.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1829 (Revelation given); 1835 (Published in this format).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated).

Textual Issues: Significant redaction from the 1833 Book of Commandments. The phrase 'gift of working with the sprout' (referring to a divining rod) was changed to 'gift of Aaron' to obscure the folk magic origins.