

SECTION 35

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, delivered in April 1829 and cataloged as Section 35 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 9 in modern editions), addresses Oliver Cowdery's failed attempt to translate the Golden Plates. Cowdery, serving as Joseph Smith's scribe, desired the gift of translation but failed to produce text. The revelation, speaking in the voice of Jesus Christ, chastises Cowdery for assuming God would simply 'give' the translation without cognitive effort ('you took no thought save it was to ask me'). It establishes a foundational Mormon epistemology: the 'burning in the bosom.' The text asserts that truth is verified through a specific somatic and emotional response to intellectual effort ('study it out in your mind'), followed by a confirmation of peace or burning. Conversely, falsehood is identified by a 'stupor of thought.' Consequently, Cowdery is stripped of the privilege to translate for the time being and commanded to resume his role as scribe for Joseph Smith, reinforcing Smith's singular role as the primary revelator.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Oliver Cowdery (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Prophet/Translator)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOMATIC EPISTEMOLOGY (BURNING IN THE BOSOM)

Assertion: Truth is confirmed by a physical/emotional sensation ('bosom shall burn') after intellectual effort, while error is signaled by a 'stupor of thought.'

"I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you: therefore, you shall feel that it is right (v3)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text establishes the primary hermeneutic of Mormonism: truth is determined by internal feeling. In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit illuminates Scripture but does not bypass the objective standard of the written Word. The Bible warns that the heart is 'deceitful above all things' (Jeremiah 17:9) and that believers must 'test the spirits' (1 John 4:1) against the apostolic deposit (Galatians 1:8). The 'burning in the bosom' creates a closed loop where emotional validation supersedes objective contradiction, whereas biblical faith is grounded in historical events and the fixed canon of Scripture.

2. PARTICIPATORY TRANSLATION

Assertion: Translation is not merely a linguistic gift but requires cognitive formulation ('study it out in your mind') before divine confirmation.

"Behold you have not understood, you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought, save it was to ask me (v3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In orthodox Christian understanding, the authors of Scripture were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), utilizing their personalities and vocabularies, but the result was God-breathed text. In this text, 'translation' is described as a process where the translator invents or formulates the phrasing mentally ('study it out') and then seeks confirmation. This suggests the Book of Mormon is a product of Joseph Smith's (or Oliver's) cognitive environment ratified by spiritual impression, rather than a direct translation of ancient linguistic characters.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental divergence lies in the authority of truth. Evangelicalism posits that God has spoken definitively in His Word (Hebrews 1:1-2), and spiritual experiences must be judged by that Word. This text inverts the order, making internal experience the judge of truth. Furthermore, the soteriological promise 'you shall be lifted up at the last day' (v5) is conditional upon 'standing fast' and 'yielding to no temptation,' presenting a works-righteousness framework that contrasts with the biblical assurance of salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) where the believer is already 'seated with Christ' (Ephesians 2:6).

Shared Values:

Importance of prayer; Need for patience; Sovereignty of God in assigning roles

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Establishes internal feeling as a co-equal or superior authority to written Scripture.
2. [Major] Theology Proper – God is depicted as withholding truth until a human performs the correct mental/emotional ritual, rather than God revealing truth by grace.
3. [Major] Sola Fide – Final salvation ('lifted up') is contingent on 'standing fast' and work performance.

Semantic Warnings:

"Translate"

In Text: A spiritual process of mental formulation and emotional confirmation, not necessarily requiring linguistic knowledge of the source text.

Evangelical: Rendering text from one language to another; or in the case of Bible translation, scholarly work to represent the original manuscripts accurately.

Example: *Oliver was told to 'study it out in his mind' to translate unknown characters, whereas a biblical translator studies the grammar and lexicon of the source language.*

"Heart/Bosom"

In Text: The organ of spiritual truth verification.

Evangelical: The center of personality often characterized by deceitfulness and in need of regeneration (Jeremiah 17:9).

Example: *The text says the bosom will burn to signal truth; the Bible says the heart is deceitful.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being 'lifted up at the last day' (v5).

How Attained: Through faithfulness, yielding to no temptation, and standing fast in the calling (works/obedience).

Basis of Assurance: Conditional on continued performance ('if you do this...').

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text makes being 'lifted up' the result of 'standing fast' and 'doing this thing.' Romans 3:28 states a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Continue to write for Joseph Smith (v1)
2. Be patient (v2)
3. Do not murmur (v2)
4. Study it out in your mind (v3)
5. Ask me if it be right (v3)
6. Stand fast in the work (v5)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's superior spiritual role
2. Trust internal feelings as the voice of God
3. Accept the loss of privileges without complaint

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, it says you must 'study it out in your mind' to receive revelation. How do you distinguish between your own thoughts/emotions and the voice of God?

2. If the Bible (God's objective Word) contradicts a 'burning in the bosom' (subjective feeling), which one do you follow?
3. Oliver Cowdery was rejected from translating because he 'feared.' How does that compare to the biblical idea that God's power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9)?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Failure of Human Effort – Just as Oliver could not perform the supernatural work of translation by his own effort, we cannot perform the supernatural work of salvation by our own effort. We fail when we try to 'work it out.' [Romans 3:20 ('Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight')]
2. The Desire for Direct Contact with God – We all want to hear God. In the Gospel, God has spoken fully and finally in His Son, Jesus Christ. [Hebrews 1:1-2]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Epistemological Anxiety [Severe] – The adherent bears the burden of constantly determining if their feelings are from God, themselves, or the devil. If they don't feel the 'burning,' they may assume they are unworthy or sinful.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The text links spiritual privilege directly to performance ('because you did not continue... I have taken away this privilege'). This creates a fear that God withdraws His gifts the moment we falter.
3. Uncertainty of Salvation [Moderate] – Salvation is framed as a future event ('lifted up at the last day') contingent on 'standing fast,' denying the believer present assurance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective Revelation (Feelings/Impressions).

Verification Method: The 'Burning in the Bosom' test: Study -> Ask -> Feel Burning (True) or Stupor (False).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology is objective and external (Scripture), illuminated by the Spirit. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 asserts Scripture is sufficient for correction. Proverbs 28:26 states, 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.' This text teaches reliance on the very faculty (the heart/emotions) the Bible warns against.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This section (Modern D&C 9) was originally Chapter 8 in the Book of Commandments (1833). Significant edits occurred between 1833 and the 1835 D&C to clarify the nature of the 'gift' Oliver had (changing 'gift of working with the sprout' to 'gift of Aaron' in the previous section, which sets the context for this failure).