

SECTION 39 (MODERN D&C 14)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, identified as Section 39 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 14 in modern editions), is a revelation dictated by Joseph Smith for David Whitmer in June 1829. Occurring shortly before the organization of the Church, it employs high-stakes apocalyptic language to mobilize Whitmer into the 'harvest.' The text asserts the immediate arrival of a 'great and marvelous work' (the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the church). It establishes a theological framework where salvation is not merely accepted but 'treasured up' through labor. The revelation identifies Jesus Christ as the speaker, affirming His role as Creator and Light, but pivots quickly to the necessity of human agency in 'assisting' to bring forth the gospel. It places a heavy emphasis on the conditional nature of eternal life, linking it directly to keeping commandments 'in all things' and enduring to the end, thereby setting a precedent for the Latter-day Saint synthesis of grace and works.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), David Whitmer (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Revelator/Medium)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL ETERNAL LIFE

Assertion: Eternal life is a gift granted only if one keeps the commandments 'in all things' and endures to the end.

"Keep my commandments in all things, and if you keep my commandments and endure to the end, you shall have eternal life (v3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, eternal life is the immediate possession of the believer upon justification by faith (John 5:24, Romans 6:23). This text, however, frames eternal life as a future reward contingent upon two factors: keeping commandments 'in all things' and 'enduring to the end.' This shifts the locus of salvation from Christ's finished work to the believer's ongoing performance. While Evangelicalism teaches that works are the fruit of salvation, this text presents them as the prerequisite for the 'greatest of all the gifts of God.'

2. SOTERIOLOGICAL LABOR

Assertion: Salvation is something 'treasured up' through the act of missionary labor (reaping).

"thrust in his sickle with his might... that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation (v2)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text uses the phrase 'treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation' in direct connection with the command to 'thrust in his sickle.' This implies a merit-based economy where spiritual labor contributes to the security or attainment of salvation. In contrast, Evangelical theology views missionary work as an act of obedience and gratitude, not a mechanism for 'treasuring up' salvation itself, which is secured solely by Christ's blood (Ephesians 1:7).

3. RESTORATION OF THE GOSPEL

Assertion: The 'fulness of the gospel' is being brought forth from the Gentiles to Israel, implying it was previously absent or lost.

"I must bring forth the fulness of my gospel from the Gentiles unto the house of Israel (v5)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text claims Jesus 'must bring forth the fulness of my gospel,' indicating that the gospel extant in 1829 (via the Bible and existing churches) was insufficient or incomplete. This supports the Mormon doctrine of the Great Apostasy. Evangelicals hold that the gates of hell did not prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18) and that the gospel has been preserved through the scriptures and the witness of the Spirit throughout history, rendering a 'restoration' of the gospel's core unnecessary.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the definition of the Gospel. In this text, the 'Gospel' is something being brought forth (the Book of Mormon/Restoration), distinct from the biblical message already possessed by Christendom. Furthermore, the text establishes a covenant of works: 'If you keep my commandments in all things... you shall have eternal life.' This 'If/Then' structure regarding eternal life is the antithesis of the Evangelical 'Because/Therefore' structure (Because you are saved, therefore keep commandments). The text places the burden of securing eternal life on the shoulders of the adherent's endurance and obedience.

Shared Values:

Jesus is the Son of the Living God; Jesus is the Creator; Necessity of Repentance; Reality of the Holy Ghost; Urgency of Evangelism

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is linked to 'reaping' and 'keeping commandments in all things.'
2. [Critical] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Eternal life is presented as a reward for endurance and obedience rather than a free gift of grace.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) – Asserts new revelation through Joseph Smith is necessary for the 'fulness' of the gospel.

Semantic Warnings:

"Eternal Life"

In Text: The greatest gift of God, conditional on strict obedience and endurance; in later LDS theology, this equates to Exaltation (Godhood).

Evangelical: The present possession of every believer in Jesus Christ (John 3:36), equating to knowing God and living in His presence.

Example: *In this text: 'If you keep my commandments... you shall have eternal life.' In Bible: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life' (John 3:36).*

"Fulness of my gospel"

In Text: The doctrines and authority contained in the Book of Mormon and the Restoration.

Evangelical: The complete revelation of God's grace in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:1-4).

Example: *The text says the fulness is being brought forth 'from the Gentiles,' referring to the Book of Mormon coming through Joseph Smith.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Eternal life, described as the 'greatest of all the gifts of God,' but framed as a future reward.

How Attained: By thrusting in the sickle (labor), keeping commandments in all things, and enduring to the end.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is based on the adherent's performance ('if you do... you shall be blessed').

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly conditions eternal life on works ('keep my commandments'), whereas Romans 3:28 states a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Give heed to my word (v1)
2. Thrust in his sickle with his might (v2)
3. Ask of me (v2)
4. Seek to bring forth and establish my Zion (v3)
5. Keep my commandments in all things (v3)

6. Endure to the end (v3)
7. Ask the Father in my name (v4)
8. Stand as a witness (v4)
9. Declare repentance unto this generation (v4)
10. Assist [in the work] (v5)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the authoritative voice of Jesus Christ
2. Commit to the specific 'work' of the coming Book of Mormon
3. Prioritize the 'cause' over personal pursuits

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly detailed in this specific text, though 'establish Zion' implies future organizational structure.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, it says you receive eternal life 'if you keep my commandments in all things.' How do you interpret 'in all things'? Does that include thoughts and motives?
2. Verse 2 mentions 'treasuring up' salvation through work. How does that relate to the biblical idea that salvation is a gift not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9)?
3. When you read 'endure to the end,' does that feel like a promise of God's keeping power, or a threat that you might lose your standing?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire to be a Witness – Just as David Whitmer desired to witness the plates, humanity desires to see God. In the Gospel, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. [Romans 8:16]
2. The White Field – The urgency to save souls is shared. However, we harvest because we are sons, not to become sons. [Matthew 9:37-38]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism / Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The command to keep commandments 'in all things' (v3) creates an impossible standard for the believer. Since no human (except Christ) can keep all commandments in all things, the adherent is left in a state of perpetual inadequacy and fear of forfeiting eternal life.
2. Uncertainty [Moderate] – By making salvation a future event dependent on 'enduring to the end,' the believer can never have true peace or assurance in the present. They are always on probation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation through a prophet (Joseph Smith) and personal spiritual confirmation.

Verification Method: Prayer and spiritual experience: 'if you will ask of me you shall receive' (v2); 'receive the Holy Ghost' (v4).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective standard of the written Word (Bible) to test spirits (1 John 4:1). This text relies on subjective internal experience ('ask and receive') to validate the prophet's new revelation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This revelation was originally Chapter XIII in the 1833 Book of Commandments. It was re-numbered to Section 39 in the 1835 D&C, and is Section 14 in current LDS editions.