

SECTION 44 (MODERN D&C 19)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally identified as Section 44 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (now Section 19), addresses Martin Harris, a wealthy farmer and early benefactor of Joseph Smith. The text serves two primary purposes: theological redefinition and financial coercion. Theologically, it radically redefines the biblical concepts of 'endless punishment' and 'eternal damnation,' asserting that these terms refer to the source of the punishment (God, whose name is Endless) rather than its duration, thereby introducing a temporary view of hell. Practically, the text commands Harris to 'impart' his property to pay the printer (E.B. Grandin) for the publication of the Book of Mormon. The revelation utilizes intense rhetorical pressure, threatening Harris that if he refuses, he will suffer the same excruciating pain that Christ suffered—described viscerally as causing one to 'bleed at every pore.' It establishes the Book of Mormon as the 'word of God' to the Gentiles and Lamanites (Jews) and demands absolute obedience to the commandments given through Joseph Smith.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Martin Harris (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), The Father, Lamanites (Target Audience)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. REDEFINITION OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

Assertion: Terms like 'endless torment' and 'eternal damnation' do not imply infinite duration, but rather indicate the quality or source of punishment (God), allowing for an eventual end to suffering.

"For behold, the mystery of Godliness, how great is it? for behold I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand, is endless punishment, for endless is my name"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, 'eternal punishment' (Matthew 25:46) is parallel to 'eternal life'; both are everlasting in duration. This text asserts a semantic shift where 'Endless' is a proper noun (a name for God). Therefore, 'Endless punishment' is simply 'God's punishment,' which the text explicitly states does not mean 'there shall be no end to this torment.' This introduces a form of temporary purgatorial suffering or universalism-lite that is foreign to orthodox Protestantism.

2. CONDITIONAL VICARIOUS ATONEMENT

Assertion: Christ suffered so that men might not suffer ***if*** they repent; however, the unrepentant must suffer the exact same suffering as Christ.

"But if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I... which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches that Christ's atonement is a unique, infinite satisfaction of divine justice that no human can replicate. If a human rejects Christ, they suffer eternal separation because they can never satisfy the debt. This text suggests that a human ***can*** suffer 'even as' Christ did, implying that human suffering has atoning or satisfying value similar to Christ's, effectively paying for their own sins through temporal torment.

3. STEWARDSHIP AS CONSECRATION

Assertion: Retaining personal property when commanded to give it to the church is a sin defined as 'coveting thine own property.'

"I command thee, that thou shalt not covet thine own property, but impart it freely to the printing of the book of Mormon"

Evangelical Comparison: While the Bible encourages generosity (2 Corinthians 9:7), it does not redefine 'coveting' (desiring what belongs to another) as 'keeping what is legally yours.' This doctrine creates a theological mechanism for asset liquidation under the guise of obeying the Ten Commandments, specifically applied here to force the financing of the Book of Mormon.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses Christian terminology, the definitions are radically altered. The 'Theological Gap' is widest in Eschatology and Soteriology. By redefining 'eternal punishment' as temporary, the text removes the finality of judgment found in Hebrews 9:27. Furthermore, the suggestion that a human can suffer 'even as' God suffered implies a view of the Atonement where suffering is a quantitative payment that a human could theoretically make, rather than a qualitative, infinite satisfaction that only the God-Man could provide. This diminishes the uniqueness of Christ's work.

Shared Values:

Necessity of repentance; Reality of judgment; Divinity of Christ (Alpha and Omega); Importance of prayer; Prohibition of adultery (coveting neighbor's wife)

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Theology Proper / Eschatology – Denies the eternal duration of hell, redefining it as a temporary state administered by God.
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new revelation that corrects/clarifies the Bible ('more express than other scriptures').
3. [Critical] Christology / Atonement – Suggests humans can suffer the same atoning pain as Christ if they don't repent.
4. [Major] Christian Ethics – Redefines 'coveting' to compel financial liquidation.

Semantic Warnings:

"Endless Punishment"

In Text: Punishment inflicted by God (who is 'Endless'), which is temporary in duration.

Evangelical: Punishment that lasts forever (Matthew 25:46, Revelation 20:10).

Example: *The text states: 'it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment; but it is written endless torment.'*

"Gospel"

In Text: A system including repentance, baptism, and obedience to new commandments to avoid suffering.

Evangelical: The good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for sinners (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: *The text links the gospel to the Book of Mormon going to the Lamanites.*

"Covet"

In Text: To withhold one's own property from the church.

Evangelical: To desire that which belongs to another (Exodus 20:17).

Example: *Command: 'Thou shalt not covet thine own property.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entering into God's rest; avoiding the 'sore' suffering that comes from disobedience.

How Attained: Through repentance, baptism, and keeping commandments (specifically financial sacrifice).

Basis of Assurance: Feelings of peace and meekness; absence of misery.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text is explicitly works-oriented. Salvation from suffering is contingent on 'keeping the commandments... received by the hand of my servant Joseph Smith.' This opposes Romans 3:28 ('justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Repent and keep commandments given by Joseph Smith
2. Do not covet your neighbor's wife or life

3. Do not covet your own property
4. Impart property to print the Book of Mormon
5. Pay the debt contracted with the printer
6. Release thyself from bondage (debt)
7. Leave house and home to preach
8. Pray vocally and in secret

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the exclusive mouthpiece of God
2. Prioritize the distribution of the Book of Mormon over personal financial security
3. Accept the redefinition of scriptural terms based on new revelation

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism
2. Reception of the Holy Ghost by fire

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says 'Endless punishment' is just God's punishment, not punishment that lasts forever. Does that mean 'Endless Life' is also just God's life, but not life that lasts forever?
2. In this passage, Jesus says if you don't repent, you must suffer 'even as I.' Do you believe a human being is capable of bearing the same weight of sin and suffering that God the Son bore?
3. Why does the text command Martin Harris not to 'covet his own property'? How does that fit with the Ten Commandments?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Fear of Suffering – We all fear pain and judgment. The Gospel offers a solution not through our own suffering or financial payment, but through Christ's finished work. [Isaiah 53:5 ('He was wounded for our transgressions... and with his stripes we are healed.')]
2. The desire for 'Peace' – True peace comes from being justified by faith, not by liquidating assets to appease a demand. [Romans 5:1 ('Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Agony [Severe] – The text imposes a terrifying prospect: if you fail to repent perfectly, you will experience the exact physical and spiritual agony of Gethsemane. This creates a high-anxiety spiritual life focused on avoiding pain.
2. Uncertainty of Truth [Moderate] – By redefining clear biblical words like 'endless,' the believer loses the stability of language. They become dependent on the prophet to decode reality, creating intellectual dependency.
3. Financial Exploitation [Severe] – The command not to 'covet thine own property' removes personal boundaries and ownership rights, making the believer vulnerable to total financial depletion for the cause.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation through a prophet and internal emotional confirmation.

Verification Method: Emotional resonance and lack of misery. The text asks, 'Canst thou read this without rejoicing?' implying that positive emotion validates the text's truth.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on subjective emotional response ('rejoicing') and the threat of 'misery' to validate its claims.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 1830 (Published in 1835 D&C)

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This revelation was critical in securing the financing for the Book of Mormon. The theological redefinition of 'endless punishment' appears as a 'mystery' revealed specifically to motivate Harris.