

# SECTION 48 (MODERN D&C 25)

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

## OVERVIEW

This text, identified as Section 48 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 25 in modern editions), is a foundational revelation given through Joseph Smith to his wife, Emma Smith, in July 1830. It holds historical significance as the first scriptural mandate regarding the role of women in the nascent Latter-day Saint movement. The text designates Emma as an 'elect lady' and outlines a specific vocation: she is to comfort Joseph in his afflictions, serve as his scribe in the absence of Oliver Cowdery, and expound scriptures to the church. Notably, she is commissioned to compile a selection of sacred hymns, establishing the theological value of music as 'a prayer unto [God].' However, the text also imposes significant theological boundaries. It commands her not to 'murmur' regarding the gold plates she is not permitted to see, demanding blind trust in Joseph's prophetic claims. Furthermore, it articulates a soteriology of conditional preservation, asserting that her entrance into God's presence is contingent upon her ability to 'keep my commandments continually.' The revelation inextricably links her spiritual standing to her support of her husband and his prophetic mission.

## KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Voice of the Revelation), Emma Smith, Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. CONDITIONAL SALVATION VIA WORKS

**Assertion:** Entrance into God's presence is contingent upon continuous commandment-keeping.

"Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this, where I am you cannot come."

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text presents a 'maintain-to-retain' model of salvation. While verse 1 mentions sins are forgiven, verse 4 explicitly states that 'except thou do this [keep commandments continually], where I am you cannot come.' In Evangelical theology, entrance into heaven is secured by the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith (Romans 3:21-26), not by the believer's personal adherence to the law. This text shifts the burden of final salvation onto the believer's performance rather than Christ's sufficiency.

### 2. PROPHETIC EXCLUSIVITY AND SECRECY

**Assertion:** Adherents must not question or demand to see the physical evidences (Gold Plates) withheld from them.

"Murmur not because of the things which thou hast not seen, for they are withheld from thee... which is wisdom in me"

**Evangelical Comparison:** Emma is commanded not to complain about being denied visual access to the Gold Plates. This establishes a hierarchy where the prophet possesses secret knowledge/artifacts that followers must accept on his word alone. In contrast, Biblical Christianity appeals to public evidence (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) and open testimony. The command to suppress doubt ('murmur not') regarding unseen claims creates an epistemological closed loop.

### 3. ECCLESIASTICAL ORDINATION OF WOMEN

**Assertion:** Emma Smith is to be ordained to expound scripture and exhort the church.

"And thou shalt be ordained under his hand to expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit"

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text uses the word 'ordained.' In 1830s Mormonism, this often meant 'set apart' or commissioned, but it uses the same language used for priesthood offices. This creates a historical tension within Mormonism (as women do not hold priesthood office in modern LDS theology) and a comparative point with Evangelicalism regarding the role of women (complementarian vs. egalitarian debates). However, the primary distinction is that her spiritual authority is derived mediate through her husband ('under his hand') rather than solely through the call of God and the church body.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

**Theological Gap:** The fundamental gap lies in the conditions of acceptance before God. The text asserts, 'except thou do this [keep commandments continually], where I am you cannot come.' This is a 'Covenant of Works' framework re-introduced in a New Testament context. Evangelical theology holds that the believer is accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6) solely through faith. Additionally, the text centers the spiritual life of the adherent around the prophet ('delight in thy husband, and the glory which shall come upon him'), creating a mediator other than Christ, whereas Evangelicalism asserts there is one mediator, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

Shared Values:

Importance of sacred music/hymns; Virtue and meekness; Rejection of worldly materialism; Forgiveness of sins

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly conditional on continuous commandment-keeping.
- 2. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Christ's work is not presented as sufficient for access to God; personal obedience is the final key.
- 3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – New revelation is given equal or greater weight than the Bible, binding the conscience of the believer.
- 4. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Authority and the Holy Ghost are mediated through the laying on of hands by the prophet/husband.

Semantic Warnings:

<p><b>"Ordained"</b></p> <p><b>In Text:</b> Commissioned or set apart for a specific task (expounding scripture) by the laying on of hands.</p> <p><b>Evangelical:</b> Typically refers to setting apart for pastoral/deacon office; in Evangelicalism, this does not imply a priesthood power necessary for salvation.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>Emma is 'ordained' to expound, but modern LDS theology distinguishes this from the Priesthood held by men.</i></p>
<p><b>"Elect Lady"</b></p> <p><b>In Text:</b> A specific title granted to Emma Smith indicating her unique status.</p> <p><b>Evangelical:</b> Used in 2 John 1:1, likely referring to a local church congregation personified or a specific noblewoman, not a hierarchical office.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> <i>Mormonism uses this to elevate Emma's status hierarchically; Evangelicals view 'elect' as the status of all believers.</i></p>

SOTERIOLOGY

**Salvation Defined:** Receiving an inheritance in Zion, a crown of righteousness, and coming where God is.

**How Attained:** By faith, virtue, and keeping commandments \*continually\*.

**Basis of Assurance:** Personal performance and obedience.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text explicitly negates Sola Fide by adding the clause 'except thou do this [works], where I am you cannot come.' (Contrast with Ephesians 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Harken unto the voice of the Lord
- 2. Walk in the paths of virtue
- 3. Murmur not because of things not seen
- 4. Comfort Joseph Smith, Jr.
- 5. Go with Joseph as a scribe
- 6. Lay aside the things of this world

7. Make a selection of sacred Hymns
8. Cleave unto covenants
9. Beware of pride
10. Keep commandments continually

**Implicit Obligations:**

1. Accept Joseph Smith's prophetic claims without empirical evidence (the plates)
2. Subordinate personal aspirations to the support of the husband's ministry
3. Derive spiritual security from obedience

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Ordination under Joseph's hand
2. Laying on of hands for the Holy Ghost

**EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**

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**Discovery Questions:**

1. In verse 4, it says 'except thou do this [keep commandments continually], where I am you cannot come.' How does that make you feel about your own assurance of salvation?
2. If entrance to God's presence depends on keeping commandments continually, how do you handle the times you fail?
3. The text tells Emma not to murmur about things she hasn't seen. Why do you think God would withhold the physical evidence of the plates from the very person scribing the translation?
4. What does it mean to you that the 'song of the righteous is a prayer unto me'?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The Song of the Heart – This beautiful truth acknowledges that God looks at the heart's posture. It bridges to the Gospel by showing God desires intimate, heart-level communion, not just external ritual. [Ephesians 5:19 ('Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord')]
2. The Desire for a Crown of Righteousness – The text promises a reward for work; the Gospel offers this crown as a gift to those who love His appearing, secured by His righteousness, not ours. [2 Timothy 4:8]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Performance Anxiety / Perfectionism [Severe] – The believer is placed under the immense burden of 'continuous' commandment-keeping to ensure their eternal destination. One slip could theoretically mean 'where I am you cannot come.'
2. Suppression of Doubt [Moderate] – The command to 'murmur not' about unseen things forces the believer to suppress rational questions and doubts about the lack of evidence, creating cognitive dissonance.
3. Vicarious Identity [Moderate] – Emma's purpose is largely defined by her utility to her husband ('comfort unto my servant Joseph'). This can create a burden where a woman's spiritual worth is tied to her role as a supporter rather than her direct standing as a daughter of God.

**EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic Revelation via Joseph Smith

**Verification Method:** Obedience and suppression of doubt ('Murmur not'). Verification is internal and experiential rather than empirical.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology encourages testing spirits (1 John 4:1) and searching the Scriptures to verify truth (Acts 17:11). This text discourages questioning the lack of physical evidence ('things which thou hast not seen').

**TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

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**Dating:** July 1830

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (dictated)

**Textual Issues:** This text was canonized in the 1835 D&C. It reflects early Mormon theology before the full development of the priesthood structure or polygamy.