

SECTION 49 (MODERN D&C 26)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, cataloged as Section 49 in the 1835 edition (Section 26 in modern editions), was dictated by Joseph Smith in July 1830. It addresses three key leaders of the nascent movement: Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and John Whitmer. The text serves two primary functions. First, it provides logistical and missiological instructions, balancing the 'studying of the scriptures' and 'preaching' with the physical necessity of 'performing your labors on the land.' This reflects the early tension in the movement between full-time ministry and the need for subsistence farming. Second, and most significantly, it canonizes the administrative principle of 'common consent' ('all things shall be done by common consent in the church'). This doctrine dictates that church business and the sustaining of officers must be approved by the voice of the membership, a practice that remains central to LDS governance, though its practical application differs significantly from Protestant congregationalism.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. COMMON CONSENT

Assertion: All church business and appointments must be done by the consent of the church body.

"And all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical congregational polity, the congregation often holds the highest earthly authority to call pastors or approve budgets, reflecting the Priesthood of All Believers. In this text, 'common consent' is established as a rule. However, in developed Mormon theology, this does not grant the members authority to nominate or create doctrine; rather, it is a ratification process (sustaining) of decisions made by the hierarchy. If a member votes opposed, it is usually treated as a disciplinary matter or a misunderstanding, rather than a veto. This contrasts with the Evangelical view where the congregation seeks the mind of Christ together, often with the power to dismiss or hire leadership.

2. CONTINUING REVELATION

Assertion: God provides incremental instructions for specific times and places, implying the Bible is insufficient for current governance.

"until after you shall go to the west... and then it shall be made known what you shall do."

Evangelical Comparison: The text promises that future instructions ('what you shall do') will be revealed later. This establishes a paradigm of 'line upon line' revelation where the canon is never closed. Evangelicalism holds to Sola Scriptura, believing that the Bible contains all necessary instruction for faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and that wisdom for specific decisions is gleaned through the illumination of the Spirit and biblical principles, not new binding authoritative revelations.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the source of authority and the nature of the church. The text assumes Joseph Smith has the authority to receive binding commands for others, establishing a prophetic hierarchy absent in the New Testament priesthood of all believers. Furthermore, the instruction to 'confirm' the church refers to a specific LDS ordinance (laying on of hands for the Holy Ghost) viewed as essential for salvation/exaltation, whereas Evangelicals view the sealing of the Spirit as occurring immediately upon justification by faith (Ephesians 1:13).

Shared Values:

Importance of Scripture study; Necessity of prayer; Church order and governance; Preaching the Gospel

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Universal Priesthood – The text implies a hierarchy where specific individuals (Smith, Cowdery, Whitmer) hold authority to 'confirm' the church, creating a mediator class.
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text presents new, binding revelation ('I say unto you') that dictates church practice outside of biblical authority.

Semantic Warnings:

"Confirming"

In Text: A priesthood ordinance involving the laying on of hands to bestow the Gift of the Holy Ghost and establish membership.

Evangelical: Strengthening or establishing believers in the faith (Acts 14:22), not a saving ordinance required for the Holy Spirit's presence.

Example: *In Acts, confirmation is spiritual strengthening. In this text, it is a ritual act required for the church's validity.*

"Common Consent"

In Text: The practice of the church body sustaining (ratifying) decisions and leaders proposed by presiding authority.

Evangelical: N/A (Conceptually similar to congregational consensus, but biblically, authority rests in the Word and qualified elders, not necessarily a democratic vote).

Example: *LDS 'Common Consent' is often a vote of support for a decision already made by revelation; Evangelical congregationalism often involves the body making the decision.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to being part of the 'confirmed' church.

How Attained: Through faith, repentance, baptism, and the 'confirming' (reception of the Holy Ghost) by proper authority.

Basis of Assurance: Obedience to the revealed commands and participation in the authorized church.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The requirement to 'confirm' the church suggests that faith alone is insufficient without the accompanying ritual ordinance administered by priesthood authority.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Devote time to studying the scriptures
2. Preach the gospel
3. Confirm the church at Colesville
4. Perform labors on the land (farming)
5. Go to the west for the next conference
6. Execute all things by common consent

Implicit Obligations:

1. Balance spiritual ministry with physical work
2. Submit to the collective voice of the church (common consent)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Confirming the church (Laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text mentions 'confirming the church.' How does this differ from the biblical idea of believers being sealed by the Spirit upon believing (Ephesians 1:13)?

2. What happens if the 'common consent' of the church disagrees with a revelation given to the prophet? How is that tension resolved?
3. Why was it necessary for God to give specific instructions about farming ('labors on the land') in a revelation? Does this imply God manages the temporal details of our lives through prophets?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Common Consent / Voice of the People – The desire to have a voice and be part of the decision-making reflects the human need for significance and belonging. In Christ, we are not just voters but 'members of one another' (Romans 12:5), functioning organically under the Headship of Christ. [Romans 12:4-5]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – The believer cannot simply rest in Christ's finished work but requires 'confirmation' and direction from specific leaders to be valid before God.
2. Uncertainty of Will [Mild] – The phrase 'then it shall be made known what you shall do' creates a dependency on future revelation rather than the sufficiency of wisdom already given in Scripture.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation via the Prophet

Verification Method: Prayer and Faith

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals verify truth by testing it against the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text posits that truth is received through immediate revelation to leadership, verified by the 'prayer and faith' of the body, rather than objective scriptural exegesis.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: July 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: This text appears as Section 49 in the 1835 edition but was renumbered to Section 26 in later editions (1876/1921/1981/2013). The content remains largely consistent.