

SECTION 57 (MODERN D&C 36)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, dated December 9, 1830, addresses Edward Partridge, a recent convert and future first bishop of the movement. The text serves a dual purpose: it validates Partridge's standing before God, declaring his sins forgiven, and simultaneously establishes a strict ecclesiastical hierarchy. While Partridge is called to preach, the text explicitly states that the Holy Ghost will be conferred 'by the hand of my servant Sidney Rigdon.' This establishes a theological precedent where spiritual power and the indwelling of the Comforter are not merely results of faith, but are mediated through specific priesthood channels (Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon). The text commands a gathering to these central figures for ordination, reinforcing the centralization of authority early in the movement's history. It concludes with eschatological urgency, referencing the Lord's sudden return to His temple.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Lord God), Edward Partridge, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Jr.

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MEDIATED PNEUMATOLOGY

Assertion: The Holy Ghost is conferred specifically through the laying on of hands by authorized priesthood leaders (Sidney Rigdon in this instance).

"I will lay my hand upon you by the hand of my servant Sidney Rigdon, and you shall receive my Spirit, the Holy Ghost"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit is the immediate seal of salvation given to every believer upon the exercise of saving faith (Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:9). There is no human mediator required to impart the Spirit. This text, however, institutionalizes the transmission of the Spirit, making the 'hand of Sidney Rigdon' the instrumental cause of Partridge receiving the Comforter. This shifts the locus of spiritual reception from a vertical relationship (Believer-God) to a triangular one (Believer-Priesthood-God).

2. CENTRALIZED ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY

Assertion: Valid ordination and sending require presenting oneself specifically before Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.

"as many as shall come before my servants Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, jr. embracing this calling... shall be ordained"

Evangelical Comparison: The text establishes a bottleneck for ministry: one must 'come before' Smith and Rigdon. In the New Testament, while order existed, the authority to preach the Gospel was grounded in the Great Commission given to the church generally (Matthew 28:19-20) and the internal call of the Spirit (Acts 13:2). This text restricts valid ministry to those physically processed by the central leadership, establishing the foundation for the exclusive priesthood claims of Mormonism.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the mediation of grace. In Evangelicalism, Christ is the sole mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), and the Holy Spirit is His immediate gift to the believer. In this text, while Christ is the source, the *administration* of the Spirit is delegated to Sidney Rigdon via ritual action. This creates a sacerdotal system where spiritual capital is dispensed by the hierarchy, rather than accessed directly through faith. Furthermore, the authority to preach is not derived from the Great Commission but from specific ordination by Smith and Rigdon.

Shared Values:

Necessity of repentance; Belief in Jesus as the Son of God; Desire for holiness ('hating garments spotted with flesh'); Expectation of the Lord's return

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Joseph Smith speaks new words of God in the first person, expanding the canon.
2. [Major] Sola Fide / Sola Gratia – Reception of the Spirit is tied to a ritual act (laying on of hands) rather than faith alone.
3. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a specific hierarchy (Smith/Rigdon) as the gatekeepers of spiritual authority and the Holy Spirit.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Holy Ghost"

In Text: A spiritual gift conferred by the laying on of hands by authorized priesthood holders.

Evangelical: The third person of the Trinity who indwells every believer upon regeneration (Romans 8:9).

Example: *In this text, Partridge receives the Spirit *after* Rigdon lays hands on him. In Acts 10:44, the Spirit falls on Gentiles *before* any ritual, solely based on hearing with faith.*

"Save yourselves"

In Text: Active participation in the gathering and ordinances (contextually implied).

Evangelical: A plea to separate from a corrupt generation (Acts 2:40), but always in the context of salvation being a work of God, not self-rescue (Ephesians 2:8).

Example: *The text uses 'Save yourselves' as a directive for the mission, implying a synergistic view of salvation.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as forgiveness of sins (v1) and escaping the 'untoward generation' (v2).

How Attained: Forgiveness is declared by the Lord, but the reception of the Spirit and authority requires ritual mediation (laying on of hands).

Basis of Assurance: The prophetic declaration ('your sins are forgiven you') and the 'peaceable things' taught by the Spirit.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text declares forgiveness, which sounds like grace, but immediately couples it with the necessity of ritual ordination for the Holy Spirit. Evangelicalism separates justification (faith alone) from office (ministry), whereas this text blends standing with God and ecclesiastical function.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Preach the gospel as with the voice of a trump
2. Declare 'Hosanna, blessed be the name of the most high God'
3. Cry repentance
4. Gird up your loins

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the authority of Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith
2. Accept the laying on of hands for spiritual empowerment

Ritual Requirements:

1. Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost
2. Ordination to the priesthood/ministry

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 1, it says Sidney Rigdon will lay hands on Edward so he can receive the Holy Ghost. How does this relate to Ephesians 1:13, which says we are sealed with the Spirit when we believe?

2. The text says 'Save yourselves from this untoward generation.' What do you think is the difference between saving yourself and being saved by Christ?
3. If the Holy Spirit is God, can a human being control when He is given to another person?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Garments spotted with the flesh – This creates a bridge to discuss the impossibility of self-cleaning. We all have 'spotted garments' (sin). [Isaiah 64:6 (filthy rags) vs. Isaiah 61:10 (garments of salvation/robe of righteousness).]
2. The Peaceable Things – Humans long for peace. True peace comes from justification by faith, not ritual performance. [Romans 5:1 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Structural Dependency [Severe] – The believer cannot fully access God (specifically the Holy Spirit) without the intervention of a specific leader (Rigdon/Smith). This creates a spiritual hierarchy where the member is always dependent on the leader for validity.
2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The command to 'save yourselves' and embrace the calling with 'singleness of heart' places the burden of spiritual safety partially on the adherent's intensity and obedience.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation confirmed by internal feeling.

Verification Method: The text promises the Spirit will teach 'the peaceable things of the kingdom,' implying an emotional or internal sense of peace as verification.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the objective standard of written Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text relies on the authority of the speaker (Smith) and the subjective experience of the hearer ('peaceable things').

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 9, 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Originally published in the Book of Commandments (1833) as Chapter 38. Re-published in 1835 D&C as Section 57. Minor editing occurred between versions to clarify priesthood terminology.