

SECTION 61 (MODERN SECTION 41)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given in February 1831 shortly after Joseph Smith's arrival in Kirtland, Ohio, marks a pivotal shift from a loose charismatic movement to a structured ecclesiastical organization. The text serves three primary functions: First, it prepares the elders to receive 'the Law' (which would be given shortly after as modern D&C 42), emphasizing that governance requires divine statutes beyond the Bible. Second, it establishes the office of the Bishop, calling Edward Partridge to leave his secular business and manage the temporal affairs of the church, instituting a hierarchy of administration. Third, it mandates material support for Joseph Smith, commanding the construction of a house where he can live and 'translate' (referring to the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible). Theologically, it draws a sharp line of demarcation: true disciples are defined strictly by their reception and active performance of this new law, with the threat of being 'cast out' for non-compliance.

KEY FIGURES

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

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL DISCIPLESHIP VIA LAW-KEEPING

Assertion: A disciple is defined exclusively as one who receives the new law and does it; failure results in expulsion.

"He that receiveth my law and doeth it the same is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple, and shall be cast out"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology teaches that discipleship is a fruit of regeneration, not a probationary status maintained by perfect adherence to a legal code (John 15:5, Ephesians 2:8-9). This text reintroduces a 'Law' paradigm where standing before God is contingent upon 'doing' the specific statutes revealed through Joseph Smith. It shifts the security of the believer from the finished work of Christ to their performance regarding the new revelation.

2. ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY (THE BISHOPRIC)

Assertion: God appoints specific individuals (Edward Partridge) to administer church affairs and requires them to abandon secular employment.

"ordained a bishop unto the church, to leave his merchandise and to spend all his time in the labors of the church"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals recognize the office of overseer/elder/pastor (1 Timothy 3), the Mormon concept of a Bishop evolves into a specific priesthood office with temporal authority over the community's resources (consecration). Here, the call requires total abandonment of secular trade ('leave his merchandise'), setting a precedent for a clergy (or lay-clergy) class that manages the 'laws' of the theocracy.

3. PROPHETIC SUSTENANCE AND TRANSLATION

Assertion: The church is commanded to provide material housing for the prophet so he can continue producing scripture ('translate').

"meet that my servant Joseph Smith, jr. should have a house built, in which to live and translate"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelicalism, the canon is closed (Jude 1:3). The command to build a house for Smith to 'translate' refers to his revision of the KJV Bible (JST). This doctrine asserts that the church's resources must support the production of extra-biblical revelation, directly challenging Sola Scriptura.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the source of authority and the definition of the church. For Evangelicals, the Church is the body of Christ governed by the completed Scriptures. In this text, the Church is a theocratic organization governed by a living prophet who issues new 'laws' that determine one's standing with God. The requirement to build a house for 'translation' signals the open canon of Mormonism, which directly contradicts the Evangelical commitment to Sola Scriptura. Furthermore, the threat of 'cursings' upon those who profess but do not obey the new prophet introduces a fear-based motivation absent in the Gospel of Grace.

Shared Values:

Desire for a pure heart (no guile).; Importance of prayer.; Expectation of the Lord's return ('I come quickly').; Need for church order/governance.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the need for new 'laws' and ongoing 'translation' of the Bible via revelation.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Conditions discipleship and inclusion on 'doing' the new law, with threats of expulsion for failure.
3. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Institutes a hierarchical priesthood office (Bishop) with specific authority over others.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Law"

In Text: A specific set of commandments and statutes about to be revealed through Joseph Smith (D&C 42).

Evangelical: Usually refers to the Mosaic Law (Torah) or the 'Law of Christ' (love) in the New Testament.

Example: *When this text says 'receive my law,' it means 'accept the new D&C revelation,' not 'obey the Bible.'*

"Bishop"

In Text: A specific priesthood office responsible for temporal affairs and judging the standing of members.

Evangelical: An overseer/pastor (episkopos) responsible for shepherding and teaching the flock (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Example: *Edward Partridge is called to leave his business to manage church property, a distinct administrative role compared to the pastoral role in the NT.*

"Translate"

In Text: Supernatural revision or expansion of text (specifically the JST Bible revision).

Evangelical: Rendering text from one language to another.

Example: *Joseph Smith was not 'translating' the Bible from Greek/Hebrew in the traditional sense, but rewriting it based on 'revelation.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to remaining a 'disciple' within the community.

How Attained: By receiving the law and doing it.

Basis of Assurance: Obedience to the prophet's commands and the new law.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly states that he who 'doeth it not... is not my disciple.' This creates a performance-based retention system, contrasting with the perseverance of the saints or security in Christ found in Evangelicalism (John 10:28).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Elders must assemble to agree on the word.
2. Pray to receive the 'law'.
3. Build a house for Joseph Smith to live and translate in.
4. Appoint and ordain Edward Partridge as bishop.
5. Edward Partridge must leave his merchandise (business).

Implicit Obligations:

1. Absolute obedience to the forthcoming 'law' to avoid being cast out.
2. Financial/labor contribution to build the prophet's house.
3. Acceptance of Joseph Smith's authority to designate roles.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination of a Bishop.
2. Prayer of faith to receive revelation.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**Discovery Questions:**

1. In this section, the Lord says a disciple is one who receives the law and does it. How do you balance the need to obey God's law with the Bible's teaching that we are saved by grace through faith, not of works?
2. The text mentions building a house for Joseph to 'translate.' Since the Bible was already translated into English (KJV), what specific translation work was he doing, and how does that impact your view of the Bible's authority?
3. Edward Partridge was called to leave his business to serve as Bishop. How does this structure of authority compare to the New Testament idea that all believers are priests?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Pure Heart (Nathaniel) – Just as Jesus valued the sincerity of Nathaniel, God desires truth in the inward parts. However, only the blood of Christ can truly cleanse the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. [Hebrews 9:14]
2. The Desire for Order – The desire for a rightly governed life is good, but the Gospel provides the Holy Spirit to write the law on our hearts, rather than an external code of ordinances. [Jeremiah 31:33]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Cursing [Severe] – The text threatens the 'heaviest of all cursings' for those who profess but do not hear/obey. This instills a deep fear of divine retribution for failing to align with the prophet.
2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – Discipleship is conditional on 'doing' the law. The believer must constantly perform to ensure they are not 'cast out' or considered 'unworthy.'
3. Financial/Material Pressure [Mild] – The command to build a house for the leader and support the Bishop creates a financial obligation on the laity to sustain the hierarchy.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation confirmed by Community Prayer

Verification Method: The elders are told to assemble and use the 'prayer of faith' to receive the law.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated interpretation of existing Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text relies on the generation of *new* authoritative words through a specific individual, verified by subjective spiritual experience.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 4, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: In the 1835 edition, this is Section 61. In modern editions, it is Section 41. The text has remained largely consistent, though headings and versification have changed.