

SECTION 63

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

OVERVIEW

This text, identified as Section 63 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 47 in modern editions), is a revelation dictated by Joseph Smith on March 8, 1831. It addresses an administrative transition within the early Latter-day Saint movement. Oliver Cowdery, the previous scribe and recorder, had been assigned to other duties (specifically a mission to the Lamanites/Missouri). Consequently, John Whitmer is called by the voice of the Lord to assume the role of keeping the 'regular history' of the church and assisting Joseph Smith in 'transcribing all things which shall be given.' The text underscores the importance of record-keeping in Mormon theology, elevating the role of Church Historian to a divinely appointed office. It promises the aid of the 'Comforter' (Holy Spirit) to Whitmer for this specific task, but notably conditions this spiritual assistance on his personal faithfulness.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith, John Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE OPEN CANON

Assertion: The text asserts that Joseph Smith will continue to receive new revelations that require transcription.

"...assist you, my servant Joseph, in transcribing all things which shall be given you..."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the canon of Scripture is closed (Jude 1:3, Revelation 22:18-19), containing all things necessary for salvation and godliness. This text, however, institutionalizes the expectation of continuous, new written scripture ('all things which shall be given you'). It establishes a bureaucratic mechanism (a scribe/historian) to capture these new revelations, implying that the Bible is insufficient and that God is adding to His written word through Joseph Smith.

2. CONDITIONAL SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT

Assertion: The assistance of the Holy Spirit is contingent upon the individual's faithfulness.

"Wherefore it shall be given him, inasmuch as he is faithful, by the Comforter, to write these things..."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches that the Holy Spirit is given to believers as a seal of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14) and distributes gifts according to His will (1 Corinthians 12:11), not based on human merit. This text introduces a 'transactional' pneumatology where the Comforter's aid in a calling is legally tied to the performance of the individual ('inasmuch as he is faithful'). This creates a theological framework where spiritual power fluctuates based on human obedience rather than resting on Christ's finished work.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the nature of revelation and the operation of the Holy Spirit. For Evangelicals, God's will for church administration is determined through wisdom, prayer, and biblical principles (1 Timothy 3), not through new, binding 'Thus saith the Lord' revelations for specific appointments. Furthermore, the text's 'inasmuch as he is faithful' clause introduces a merit-based system for spiritual empowerment, contrasting with the Evangelical understanding of grace where the Spirit equips believers based on Christ's righteousness, not their own performance.

Shared Values:

The importance of history and record-keeping.; The belief in the Holy Spirit (Comforter) as a helper.; The necessity of faithfulness in service.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text assumes an open canon where new 'things' are constantly given and must be transcribed as scripture.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Spiritual assistance is conditional on human faithfulness ('inasmuch as he is faithful').

Semantic Warnings:

"The Comforter"

In Text: A spiritual aid granted conditionally to assist in administrative tasks (writing history).

Evangelical: The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who indwells believers permanently as a seal of salvation (John 14:16, Ephesians 1:13).

Example: *In this text, the Comforter helps write history 'inasmuch as he is faithful.' In the Bible, the Comforter is given because of Christ's intercession, to abide 'forever' (John 14:16).*

"Faithful"

In Text: Performance-based obedience required to unlock spiritual power.

Evangelical: Trusting in Christ; full reliance on God (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: *Here, faithfulness is the *condition* for the Spirit's help. In the Gospel, the Spirit is the *source* of faithfulness.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Not explicitly defined in this text, but implies a system where standing with God is maintained through fulfilling church callings.

How Attained: Implicitly through obedience to revealed commands.

Basis of Assurance: Performance ('inasmuch as he is faithful').

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on works (writing, transcribing) and faithfulness as the basis for spiritual aid, rather than faith in Christ's finished work.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. John Whitmer must write and keep a regular history.
2. John Whitmer must assist Joseph Smith in transcribing revelations.
3. John Whitmer is permitted to lift his voice in meetings when expedient.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Adherents must accept the administrative organization of the church as divinely revealed.
2. John Whitmer must maintain a certain level of 'faithfulness' to receive the Spirit's help in writing.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When the text says the Comforter will help 'inasmuch as he is faithful,' how does a person know when they have been faithful enough to merit that help?
2. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is a gift (Acts 2:38). Why does this revelation present the Spirit's help as a conditional reward for doing a job?
3. Why was a direct revelation necessary to appoint a historian? How does this differ from how the early church selected leaders in Acts 6?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Remembrance – Just as this text emphasizes the importance of a record, the Bible speaks of the 'Book of Life.' God remembers His people not because of their perfect history, but because their names are written in the Lamb's book of life. [Revelation 21:27, Malachi 3:16]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Instability [Moderate] – The believer lives in a state of flux where new revelations can constantly change duties, doctrines, and expectations.
2. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The phrase 'inasmuch as he is faithful' places the burden of spiritual success entirely on the shoulders of the individual. If the task fails or becomes difficult, the implication is that the individual lacked sufficient faithfulness.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation through a prophet (Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Implicit trust in the prophet's declaration of God's will.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105) tested against the closed canon (Acts 17:11). This text relies on the immediate, subjective voice of a modern prophet to dictate administrative duties.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 8, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text appears as Section 47 in modern editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. The 1835 edition (Section 63) reflects the early compilation efforts.