

SECTION 70

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, historically dated to August 8, 1831 (and numbered Section 60 in modern editions), addresses the elders of the Church returning from Independence, Missouri ('Zion') to Kirtland, Ohio. The text opens with a divine rebuke: the Lord is displeased with missionaries who 'hide their talent' by failing to preach due to the 'fear of man.' It establishes a stark dichotomy between the authorized servants of Joseph Smith and the 'congregations of the wicked' (referring to the general population and other Christian denominations). The text provides logistical instructions for travel via St. Louis and Cincinnati and explicitly commands the elders not to idle away their time. Theologically significant is the instruction to perform a secret ritual—washing feet and shaking off dust—as a testimony against those who reject their message, to be used in the day of judgment. The revelation reinforces Joseph Smith's role as the mouthpiece of God, asserting that through his mouth, the will of the Lord regarding the movements of other leaders (Rigdon and Cowdery) is made known.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Voice of the Revelation), Joseph Smith, Jr., Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, Edward Partridge, The Elders (Missionaries)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL DIVINE FAVOR

Assertion: God's pleasure is contingent upon the boldness of missionary efforts; fear of man kindles God's anger.

"with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths... Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them."

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, God's pleasure is explicitly tied to the performance of the elders. If they fail to speak due to fear, God's anger is kindled, and they risk losing 'that which they have.' In contrast, Evangelical theology posits that a believer's standing before God is based on the finished work of Christ (Romans 5:1, 8:1). While evangelism is a command in Christianity, failure to evangelize due to fear does not revoke justification or kindle God's wrath against His adopted children in the way this text threatens.

2. RITUAL CURSING

Assertion: Missionaries are authorized to perform a secret ritual (washing feet/shaking dust) to seal a testimony against those who reject them.

"shake off the dust of thy feet against those who receive thee not... in secret, and wash thy feet as a testimony against them in the day of judgment"

Evangelical Comparison: The text instructs a ritualistic washing of feet 'in secret' to serve as a testimony against rejecters in the final judgment. This transforms the biblical narrative of shaking off dust (a public sign of leaving responsibility behind) into a private, liturgical act of condemnation. Evangelical Christianity teaches believers to bless those who curse them (Luke 6:28) and leaves all judgment to God, rejecting the idea that human agents should perform rituals to secure the condemnation of others.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the nature of the relationship between God and the laborer. In this text, the laborer is threatened with the loss of 'that which he has' and divine anger for failing to perform adequately in evangelism. This suggests a probationary state of salvation dependent on works. Evangelicalism posits that works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10). Furthermore, the text designates other Christian groups as 'congregations of the wicked,' creating an ecclesiological exclusivity that denies the validity of the wider Body of Christ.

Shared Values:

Importance of evangelism; God's sovereignty over the earth; Stewardship of talents; Warning against the fear of man

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – God's pleasure and the retention of blessings are conditioned on the work of preaching.
2. [Moderate] Theology Proper (Nature of God) – Depicts God as easily angered by human weakness (social anxiety/fear), contradicting the God who comforts the fearful.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where specific men have authority to ritually judge others 'in secret.'

Semantic Warnings:

"Congregations of the wicked"

In Text: Non-Mormon religious assemblies (including other Christian denominations) encountered by the missionaries.

Evangelical: Assemblies of evildoers or those who hate God (Psalm 26:5); Evangelicals would not categorize other Trinitarian churches this way.

Example: *When the text says preach among the 'congregations of the wicked,' it means preaching to Presbyterians and Methodists, not just criminals.*

"Talent"

In Text: Specifically the priesthood authority and the commission to preach Mormonism.

Evangelical: A unit of weight/money in the parable, representing resources or opportunities entrusted by God.

Example: *Hiding the talent here specifically means failing to proselytize for the Church.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as retaining 'that which they have' and eventually being made 'holy.'

How Attained: Through faithfulness in the calling, specifically preaching and not hiding the talent.

Basis of Assurance: Conditional: 'If they are not more faithful... it shall be taken away.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly links forgiveness and holiness to the active obedience of the elders ('I am able to make you holy... preach the word'). Sola Fide asserts justification happens at the moment of faith, independent of future missionary success.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Return speedily to St. Louis
2. Preach the word with loud voices
3. Do not idle away time
4. Do not bury the talent
5. Shake off dust and wash feet against those who reject the message

Implicit Obligations:

1. Overcome social anxiety (fear of man) to avoid God's anger
2. Accept Joseph Smith's travel logistics as divine command

Ritual Requirements:

1. Washing of feet as a testimony against rejecters (performed in secret)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. How do you interpret the verse where God says His anger is kindled against those who don't open their mouths due to fear? Does that match your experience of God's patience?
2. The text mentions washing feet as a testimony *against* people. How does that compare to Jesus washing the disciples' feet as an act of service?
3. If a missionary tries their best but is paralyzed by anxiety, does God take away 'that which they have'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire to be God's 'Jewels' – The text appeals to the human desire to be treasured by God. The Gospel fulfills this not through our work, but through Christ's purchase of us. [Malachi 3:17, 1 Peter 2:9 ('a peculiar people/royal priesthood')]
2. The need for holiness – The text acknowledges the need for holiness but ties it to the mission. The Gospel offers holiness as a gift through the Spirit. [Hebrews 10:10 ('we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer feels that their standing with God is constantly at risk if they are not 'bold' enough in proselytizing.
2. Fear of Divine Wrath [Moderate] – The text weaponizes God's anger against those who struggle with the 'fear of man' (social anxiety), compounding their fear.
3. Us vs. Them Isolation [Moderate] – Labeling others as 'congregations of the wicked' and performing secret rituals against them creates deep psychological isolation from the outside world.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Dictation

Verification Method: Obedience to the prophetic voice serves as the validation; the text assumes its own authority.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests prophecy against Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience based on the assertion that it is the Lord speaking, without external scriptural validation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 8, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was canonized in the 1835 D&C as Section 70. In modern LDS editions, it is Section 60. The content reflects the early consolidation of authority.