

SECTION 8

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

OVERVIEW

This text, known in modern Latter-day Saint editions as Section 6, is a foundational revelation given in April 1829 to Oliver Cowdery through Joseph Smith. It marks the arrival of Cowdery as Smith's primary scribe for the Book of Mormon translation. The text serves a dual purpose: apologetic verification and missiological commissioning. First, it establishes a subjective epistemology by reminding Cowdery of a private spiritual experience ('the night that you cried unto me') which Smith could not have known naturally, thereby validating Smith's prophetic claims to Cowdery. Second, it commissions Cowdery to assist in the 'great and marvelous work' of bringing forth hidden scriptures. Theologically, it presents salvation as a conditional reward for faithfulness and commandment-keeping ('hold out faithful to the end, thou shalt be saved'). It also grants Cowdery the 'gift to translate,' placing him briefly on a similar charismatic tier as Smith, provided he remains humble. The text heavily utilizes New Testament language to describe this new American restorationist project.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Oliver Cowdery (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Servant/Prophet)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL SALVATION (MERIT-BASED)

Assertion: Salvation is a future reward contingent upon doing good, keeping commandments, and enduring to the end.

"If thou wilt do good, yea, and hold out faithful to the end, thou shalt be saved in the kingdom of God... (Verse 5); Keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven (Verse 16)."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, salvation is a present possession received instantly upon faith in Christ (John 5:24, Ephesians 2:8-9), with good works following as the fruit of regeneration. This text reverses that order, establishing an 'If/Then' covenant structure: 'If thou wilt do good... thou shalt be saved.' Salvation is portrayed not as a gift currently held, but as a future prize ('treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation') earned through cumulative obedience ('keep my commandments') and endurance ('hold out faithful'). This introduces a probationary anxiety absent in the biblical assurance of Sola Fide.

2. SUBJECTIVE EPISTEMOLOGY (BURNING IN THE BOSOM)

Assertion: Truth is verified by internal peace and the enlightenment of the mind by the Spirit, serving as the primary witness of external reality.

"Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God? (Verse 11); I tell thee these things... that thou mayest know that thou hast been enlightened (Verse 7)."

Evangelical Comparison: The text establishes a closed loop of verification where internal feelings ('peace to your mind') validate the external revelation. In this instance, Joseph Smith reveals the content of Oliver's private prayer to prove Joseph's power. While Evangelicals affirm the internal witness of the Spirit (Romans 8:16), it is never the sole test of truth, nor does it supersede the objective testing of spirits against Scripture (1 John 4:1). This doctrine lays the foundation for the Mormon 'testimony' which relies on emotional resonance as the final arbiter of historical and theological truth.

3. RESTORATION OF HIDDEN SCRIPTURE

Assertion: God has reserved hidden records containing 'much of the gospel' that must now be brought to light due to previous wickedness.

"Records which contain much of my gospel, which have been kept back because of the wickedness of the people... bring to light... those parts of my scriptures which have been hidden (Verse 12)."

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts that the existing biblical record is insufficient or incomplete ('kept back'). It posits that 'much of my gospel' is contained in these new records (the Book of Mormon). Evangelicalism holds to the sufficiency of the 66 books of the canon (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Jude 1:3), believing

the Gospel was fully delivered to the saints. This text implies the Gospel was partially lost or hidden, necessitating a restoration of texts to complete the plan of salvation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses familiar Christian terminology (salvation, gospel, advocate, harvest), the definitions are fundamentally altered. Salvation is shifted from a monergistic act of God (Sola Gratia) to a synergistic cooperation where the believer must 'hold out faithful' to be saved. Furthermore, the authority structure is shifted from the fixed canon of the Bible (Sola Scriptura) to a living, evolving stream of revelation through a specific prophet, validated by internal feelings. This creates a theological system where Christ is the enabler of salvation, but the believer is the achiever of it.

Shared Values:

Divinity of Jesus Christ; Necessity of Repentance; Importance of Scripture (though definitions differ); Concept of a final judgment/harvest

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation is explicitly conditional on 'doing good' and 'holding out faithful,' making works a cause of final salvation rather than a fruit.
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) – Asserts the Bible is incomplete ('kept back') and requires new, hidden records to provide the full gospel.
3. [Major] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – While affirming Christ's divinity, the text implies His work was insufficient to preserve the gospel message, necessitating a restoration.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: A future state in the Kingdom of God achieved by doing good and holding out faithful to the end.

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death, accomplished by Christ and received by faith, resulting in immediate justification (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Example: Verse 5: '*If thou wilt do good... thou shalt be saved.*'

"Gospel"

In Text: A system of laws and ordinances contained in hidden records (Book of Mormon) necessary for the fullness of truth.

Evangelical: The good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: Verse 12: '*Records which contain much of my gospel.*'

"Mysteries"

In Text: Hidden knowledge or extra-biblical information revealed to the faithful.

Evangelical: Truths once hidden but now fully revealed in Christ to all believers (Colossians 1:26).

Example: Verse 7: '*Find out mysteries.*'

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Inheriting the kingdom of God; a future state secured by faithfulness.

How Attained: By desiring, asking, keeping commandments, doing good, and holding out faithful to the end (Synergism).

Basis of Assurance: Personal revelation ('peace to your mind') and the evidence of one's own diligence.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text commands: 'If thou wilt do good... thou shalt be saved.' The Bible teaches: 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us' (Titus 3:5).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Thrust in his sickle with his might (Verse 2)
2. Seek not for riches but for wisdom (Verse 3)
3. Say nothing but repentance unto this generation (Verse 4)
4. Make not thy gift known unto any, save it be those who are of thy faith (Verse 5)
5. Stand by my servant Joseph faithfully (Verse 8)
6. Admonish him in his faults and also receive admonition of him (Verse 8)
7. Look unto me in every thought (Verse 16)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's revelations as the word of God
2. Validate spiritual experiences through internal feelings
3. Prioritize the 'cause of Zion' over personal pursuits

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly detailed in this specific text, though 'keep my commandments' implies adherence to broader ordinances.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 5, it says 'if thou wilt do good... thou shalt be saved.' How do you interpret that in light of Ephesians 2:8 which says we are saved by grace through faith, not of works?
2. The text mentions 'records which contain much of my gospel' that were hidden. What specific parts of the Gospel (the good news of Jesus) do you feel are missing from the New Testament?
3. Verse 11 talks about God speaking peace to the mind as a witness. Do you believe our internal feelings can ever mislead us, and if so, what is the objective standard we should check them against?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for assurance – Oliver sought assurance of his standing and the truth. The Gospel offers objective assurance not through fleeting feelings, but through the unchanging promise of God in Christ. [1 John 5:13 - 'These things have I written... that ye may KNOW that ye have eternal life.']}
2. The Wounds of Christ – The text points to Christ's wounds as a source of comfort. This is the heart of the Gospel–His wounds paid for our sins completely, removing the burden of having to earn salvation through 'doing good.' [Isaiah 53:5 - 'But he was wounded for our transgressions... and with his stripes we are healed.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The believer is placed on a treadmill of 'doing good' and 'holding out faithful' to secure salvation. There is no rest, only the command to 'thrust in the sickle' with all might to 'treasure up' salvation.
2. Uncertainty of Standing [Moderate] – Since salvation is conditional on 'the end' (Verse 5), the believer cannot know they are saved in the present, only that they are currently on probation.
3. Epistemological Isolation [Moderate] – By defining truth as a private, internal experience ('mind' and 'thoughts'), the believer is isolated from objective verification. If they doubt, they are often told they have lost the Spirit, creating a cycle of self-blame.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation confirmed by internal emotional/mental resonance ('peace to your mind').

Verification Method: The adherent is instructed to recall previous spiritual feelings ('cast your mind upon the night') as proof of the current revelation's truthfulness.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests prophets by their adherence to previous revelation (Deuteronomy 13:1-5, Acts 17:11). This text validates the prophet via the recipient's subjective experience, creating a subjective feedback loop.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text (Section 8 in 1835) is Section 6 in modern editions. It was originally part of the 'Book of Commandments' (Chapter 5). Significant editing occurred between the 1833 Book of Commandments and the 1835 D&C to clarify theological points.