

SECTION 24

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Given in July 1830 during a period of intense persecution in Harmony, Pennsylvania, Doctrine and Covenants Section 24 serves as a pivotal administrative and theological text for the nascent Latter-day Saint movement. In this revelation, the voice of Jesus Christ (speaking through Joseph Smith) explicitly separates Smith's calling from 'temporal labors,' stating he will not have strength in physical work (farming) and must instead rely on the church for material support (food, raiment, money). This establishes a professional clergy model centered on the Prophet early in the movement's history. The text also addresses the persecution Smith and Oliver Cowdery were facing. It offers comfort ('I have lifted thee up out of thine afflictions') but also empowers them with aggressive spiritual authority. They are instructed to 'cast off the dust of your feet' as a testimony against those who reject them, an act explicitly defined here as leaving a 'cursing instead of a blessing.' Furthermore, the text claims that those who physically attack the leaders will be smitten by God upon the leaders' command, and those who take legal action against them will be cursed. The revelation reinforces the production of new scripture, referencing the Book of Mormon and the ongoing work of 'writing' (likely the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible) and 'expounding' scripture.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, The Church (specifically in Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC IMMUNITY AND RETRIBUTION

Assertion: God will curse those who reject, sue, or physically attack Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery upon their command.

"And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall lay their hands upon you by violence, ye shall command to be smitten in my name... And whosoever shall go to law with thee shall be cursed by the law. (D&C 24:16-17)"

Evangelical Comparison: While the New Testament acknowledges God's ultimate vengeance (Romans 12:19), it explicitly forbids Christians from cursing their persecutors (Luke 6:28, Romans 12:14). Section 24 authorizes a ritualized cursing ('casting off the dust... leaving a cursing instead of a blessing') and commands the leaders to call down smiting upon attackers. This shifts the role of the prophet from a suffering servant (like Paul) to a protected figure with the authority to invoke immediate divine retribution.

2. CLERICAL EXEMPTION FROM TEMPORAL LABOR

Assertion: Joseph Smith is divinely exempted from physical work to focus on spiritual duties, necessitating church support.

"And in temporal labors thou shalt not have strength, for this is not thy calling... for the church shall give unto thee in the very hour what thou needest (D&C 24:9, 18)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism affirms that pastors should be supported (1 Timothy 5:18), but Section 24 goes further by stating Joseph Smith *cannot* have strength in temporal labors because it is 'not his calling.' This creates a metaphysical distinction between the prophet and the laity regarding work. In contrast, the Apostle Paul frequently emphasized his own manual labor (Acts 18:3, 2 Thessalonians 3:8) specifically to set an example and not be a burden, whereas this text mandates the burden be placed on the members.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the nature of apostolic authority and ethics. In Evangelicalism, authority is derived from Scripture, and the ethic is one of suffering love—blessing those who curse. Section 24 presents a 'Restorationist' authority where the leader's words are immediate law, and the ethic includes authorized retribution (cursing, smiting). Additionally, the text elevates the 'Book of Mormon'

(v1) to the status of a divine calling, creating a fundamental schism with the sufficiency of the Bible. The soteriology implies that salvation is mediated through this specific 'ministry' and 'church,' rather than accessible solely through faith in Christ's finished work.

Shared Values:

The necessity of preaching the gospel; Reliance on God during affliction; The reality of spiritual warfare (Satan, darkness); The validity of miracles (healing, casting out devils)

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Christian Ethics (Sermon on the Mount) – Commands to curse enemies and command them to be smitten contradict Jesus' teaching to 'love your enemies' (Matt 5:44).
2. [Minor] Universal Priesthood / Servant Leadership – Creates a clergy class divinely exempted from work, demanding support from the laity, unlike the New Testament model of voluntary giving and leaders willing to work.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the Book of Mormon and ongoing revelations (v1, v5) as authoritative alongside or above the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gospel"

In Text: The specific message of the Restoration, including the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's authority.

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

Example: *When verse 12 says 'declare my gospel,' it includes the new requirements of the Restoration, not just the biblical kerygma.*

"Office"

In Text: A specific priesthood calling or rank with inherent authority and duties.

Evangelical: A function or service within the body of Christ, not necessarily a hierarchical rank (Romans 12:4-8).

Example: *Joseph is told to 'magnify thine office' (v3), implying a formal institutional position.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to accepting the 'gospel' preached by Smith and Cowdery and gathering to 'Zion'.

How Attained: Through obedience to the 'calling,' enduring to the end, and participating in the 'pruning' of the vineyard.

Basis of Assurance: Divine promises of presence ('I am with thee') contingent on obedience and endurance.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'magnifying' one's office and 'works' (pruning, preaching) as the path to glory ('In me he shall have glory...'), contrasting with the passive reception of righteousness through faith alone (Romans 4:5).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go to Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester (v3)
2. Magnify thine office (v3)
3. Continue writing and expounding scriptures (v5)
4. Require not miracles unless commanded (v13)
5. Take no purse nor scrip (v18)
6. Command attackers to be smitten (v16)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Church members must provide food, clothing, and money to Joseph Smith (v3, v18)
2. Adherents must accept the Book of Mormon as a divine calling (v1)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Laying on of hands (v9)
2. Confirming the churches (v9)
3. Casting off the dust of feet as a testimony/cursing (v15)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 15, the text instructs missionaries to leave a 'cursing' on those who reject them. How do you balance this with Jesus' command in Luke 6:28 to 'bless those who curse you'?
2. Verse 9 says Joseph Smith would not have strength in temporal labors because it wasn't his calling. How does this compare to the Apostle Paul, who worked as a tentmaker to avoid being a burden to the church (1 Thess 2:9)?
3. The text mentions Joseph Smith's 'transgressions' in verse 2. What is the biblical process for a leader dealing with sin, and how does it relate to the qualification of being 'above reproach' (1 Timothy 3:2)?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The need for deliverance from 'afflictions' and 'powers of darkness'. – Just as Joseph felt the weight of darkness and needed deliverance, every human is under the power of sin and death. Jesus provides the ultimate deliverance not just from temporal enemies, but from the spiritual enemy. [Colossians 1:13 - 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial Pressure [Moderate] – The text places the sole responsibility for the leader's material needs on the congregation, framing it as a divine command. Failure to support the leader brings a 'cursing' (v4).
2. Fear of Retribution [Severe] – The constant threat of 'cursing' for rejection or legal action creates a culture of fear and insularity, discouraging critical examination or departure from the group.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct, immediate revelation via the 'Comforter' and the voice of Christ.

Verification Method: The fulfillment of blessings and cursings; the experience of 'strength' in spiritual vs. temporal tasks.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective, completed revelation of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) illuminated by the Spirit. Section 24 relies on subjective, real-time dictation that claims to supersede or expand upon biblical authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: July 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Early manuscript versions of D&C revelations were often edited before the 1835 publication to reflect developing theology (e.g., priesthood offices).