

SECTION 25

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 25, received in July 1830, is a personal revelation directed to Emma Smith, the wife of Joseph Smith. It is historically significant as the first scriptural mandate in Mormonism specifically addressing a woman's role within the restoration movement. The text designates Emma as an 'elect lady' and outlines a specific vocational calling: she is to comfort Joseph in his afflictions, serve as his scribe, expound scriptures, and compile a hymnal. Theologically, the text establishes a hierarchical spiritual dynamic where Emma is to be ordained under Joseph's hand to receive the Holy Ghost and is instructed to delight in the glory that will come upon him. Crucially, the text concludes with a stark soteriological ultimatum: her entrance into God's presence is contingent upon keeping commandments 'continually.' It also contains an epistemological warning not to 'murmur' regarding the physical objects (the Gold Plates) she was not permitted to view, reinforcing the requirement of blind trust in Joseph's prophetic claims.

KEY FIGURES

Emma Smith, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL EXALTATION

Assertion: Entrance into God's presence is contingent upon continuous commandment-keeping.

"Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this, where I am you cannot come." (D&C 25:15)

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, justification is a forensic declaration by God based on the finished work of Christ, received by faith alone (Romans 3:28, Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation. D&C 25:15, however, frames the ultimate destination ('where I am') as a reward contingent upon the believer's ability to 'keep my commandments continually.' The phrase 'except thou do this' introduces a works-based conditionality to final salvation that denies the sufficiency of Christ's imputation of righteousness.

2. MEDIATED PNEUMATOLOGY

Assertion: The Holy Ghost is received through the laying on of hands by a priesthood holder (Joseph).

"For he shall lay his hands upon thee, and thou shalt receive the Holy Ghost..." (D&C 25:8)

Evangelical Comparison: Biblically, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer at the moment of regeneration and faith (Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:9). While the laying on of hands appears in Acts for specific apostolic validations, Evangelicalism rejects the idea that the Spirit is mechanically dispensed through human agents as a requirement for reception. This text reinforces a hierarchical structure where access to spiritual power is mediated through Joseph Smith.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text promotes virtues common to Christianity (meekness, worship, fidelity), the underlying structure of salvation is fundamentally different. In Evangelicalism, the believer is secure in Christ's finished work. In D&C 25, the believer (Emma) is placed on a probation where the outcome ('where I am') is uncertain and contingent on her ability to 'keep my commandments continually.' Furthermore, the text elevates Joseph Smith to a necessary mediator between God and Emma, both for revelation and the reception of the Holy Spirit, violating the doctrine of the Universal Priesthood of Believers (1 Timothy 2:5, 1 Peter 2:5).

Shared Values:

Importance of hymns/worship; Virtue and meekness; Rejection of worldly materialism; Marriage fidelity

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation/Presence with God is conditioned on 'keeping commandments continually' (v15).
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new, binding revelation through Joseph Smith that supplements the Bible.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – The Holy Spirit is dispensed through the laying on of hands by the prophet-husband (v8).

Semantic Warnings:

"Ordained"

In Text: In 1830 Mormonism, this meant 'set apart' or appointed to a calling, not necessarily holding Priesthood office (which is male-only in LDS theology).

Evangelical: Often implies setting apart for specific ministry, but in the context of 'receiving the Holy Ghost' (v8), it suggests a sacramental efficacy not found in the Bible for this context.

Example: *Emma is 'ordained' to expound scripture, but this does not grant her ecclesiastical authority equal to the elders.*

"Elect Lady"

In Text: A specific title for Emma Smith, later interpreted as her presidency over the Relief Society.

Evangelical: Used in 2 John 1:1, likely referring to a local church congregation or a specific noblewoman, denoting chosenness in Christ.

Example: *Mormonism uses this to establish a specific hierarchical office for Emma.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Receiving an inheritance in Zion (v2), coming where God is (v15), receiving a crown of righteousness (v15).

How Attained: Faithfulness, walking in paths of virtue (v2), keeping commandments continually (v15).

Basis of Assurance: There is no present assurance; it is prospective based on future performance ('if thou art faithful').

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. Romans 8:1 offers 'no condemnation' for those in Christ; D&C 25:15 offers exclusion ('cannot come') for those who fail to keep commandments continually.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Harken unto the voice of the Lord (v1)
2. Murmur not because of things not seen (v4)
3. Comfort Joseph Smith (v5)
4. Go with him and be a scribe (v6)
5. Lay aside things of this world (v10)
6. Make a selection of sacred hymns (v11)
7. Cleave unto covenants (v13)
8. Keep commandments continually (v15)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's prophetic authority without physical evidence (regarding the plates)
2. Derive spiritual identity partially through the husband's calling
3. Submit to ordination/setting apart by the husband

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination/Laying on of hands (v7-8)
2. Singing/Hymnody as prayer (v12)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 15, it says you cannot come where God is unless you keep commandments 'continually.' How do you define 'continually'?
2. If salvation depends on continuous obedience, how do you deal with the days where you fall short?
3. Verse 4 mentions things 'withheld' from Emma. Why do you think she wasn't allowed to see the plates despite being the 'elect lady'?
4. How does the 'song of the righteous' as a prayer (v12) impact your personal worship life?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Song of the Heart – This beautiful truth reflects the biblical idea that worship flows from the heart to God. It bridges to the Gospel by showing God desires internal truth, not just external ritual. [Ephesians 5:19 'Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.']
2. Desire for Forgiveness – Emma's need for forgiveness is universal. The Gospel offers this forgiveness not based on her future work as a scribe, but on Christ's past work on the cross. [1 John 1:9 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us...']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The command to keep commandments 'continually' or be barred from God's presence creates an impossible standard, leading to chronic guilt or self-deception.
2. Suppression of Doubt [Moderate] – The command to 'murmur not' about unseen things (v4) trains the adherent to suppress rational questions about evidence, creating cognitive dissonance.
3. Vicarious Identity [Moderate] – Emma is told to delight in the glory that comes upon her husband (v14), anchoring her spiritual worth and identity in another human being rather than directly in Christ.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (via Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Obedience and suppression of doubt ('Murmur not').

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology encourages testing spirits (1 John 4:1) and examining scriptures (Acts 17:11). This text explicitly discourages inquiry into the 'unseen' (the plates), demanding blind trust in the prophet's claim (v4).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: July 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Early manuscripts show minor variations, but the core theology of conditional salvation and Emma's role remains consistent.