

SECTION 35

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

OVERVIEW

Given in December 1830, this revelation addresses Sidney Rigdon, a prominent former Campbellite minister who had recently converted to Mormonism. The text functions as a theological bridge and a transfer of authority. It acknowledges Rigdon's past ministry as being 'sent forth, even as John [the Baptist]' to prepare the way, yet explicitly states that his previous baptisms were insufficient because they lacked the authority to confer the Holy Ghost. The revelation establishes the necessity of the restored priesthood for the completion of salvation ordinances. Furthermore, it commissions Rigdon to replace Oliver Cowdery as Joseph Smith's scribe for the 'translation' of the Bible (the Joseph Smith Translation), asserting that these new scriptures are necessary for the 'salvation of mine own elect.' The text reinforces the exclusive claims of the nascent church, asserting that outside of this 'fulness of the gospel,' there are 'none that doeth good.' It concludes with eschatological urgency, promising miracles to the faithful and warning that the Second Coming is nigh.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, John the Baptist, Elijah

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. INSUFFICIENCY OF TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Assertion: Previous Christian baptisms (specifically Rigdon's Campbellite ministry) were preparatory but invalid for conveying the Holy Ghost due to lack of priesthood authority.

"Thou didst baptize by water unto repentance, but they received not the Holy Ghost; But now I give unto thee a commandment... they shall receive the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands (D&C 35:5-6)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit is the 'seal' of salvation received at the moment of regeneration and faith (Ephesians 1:13-14). Baptism is an outward sign of this inward grace. D&C 35 posits that the Holy Ghost cannot be received except through a specific ritual ('laying on of hands') performed by one holding restored authority (Joseph Smith's line). This effectively invalidates the spiritual experience of all non-Mormon Christians, categorizing their faith as merely 'preparatory' like John the Baptist's, rather than saving.

2. OPEN CANON AND SCRIPTURAL NECESSITY

Assertion: New scriptures (Joseph's Bible revision) are being produced which are required for the salvation of the elect.

"The scriptures shall be given... to the salvation of mine own elect (D&C 35:20)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism holds to the sufficiency of the 66-book canon (2 Timothy 3:16-17). D&C 35:20 implies that without the specific 'scriptures' Joseph Smith was currently producing (the JST), the 'elect' could not fully attain salvation. This shifts the power of salvation from the finished work of Christ revealed in the Bible to the ongoing revelatory work of the Prophet.

3. EXCLUSIVE ECCLESIASTICAL VALIDITY

Assertion: Only those receiving the restored gospel are considered to be 'doing good'; all others are under judgment.

"And there are none that doeth good except those who are ready to receive the fulness of my gospel (D&C 35:12)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals believe that 'no one does good' in a meritorious sense (Romans 3:12), they affirm that the Spirit works through all believers. D&C 35:12 redefines 'doing good' as being contingent on accepting the 'fulness of the gospel' (Mormonism). This creates a binary where all non-Mormon Christian efforts are ultimately categorized as part of 'Babylon' (D&C 35:11).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in Ecclesiology and Pneumatology. D&C 35 asserts that the Holy Spirit is not present in the life of a believer through faith alone but is mediated exclusively through the 'laying on of hands' by the restored priesthood. This disenfranchises all other Christians from the body of Christ. Additionally, the text elevates Joseph Smith to a position where his 'keys' and his revision of the Bible are necessary conditions for the salvation of the elect, violating the Evangelical tenet of Sola Christus (Christ alone is the mediator) and Sola Scriptura.

Shared Values:

Belief in Jesus as the Son of God; Necessity of repentance; Expectation of the Second Coming; Desire for holiness/purity

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Denies that believers have direct access to the Holy Spirit's sealing power through faith; restricts it to a hierarchical priesthood.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Adds ritual requirements (laying on of hands by specific authority) as necessary for the full reception of God's grace and Spirit.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the Bible is insufficient and requires Joseph Smith's inspired revisions for the 'salvation of the elect.'
4. [Major] Ecclesiology (Nature of the Church) – Declares that no one outside this specific group 'doeth good,' effectively un-churching all other Christians.

Semantic Warnings:

"Fulness of the Gospel"

In Text: The Mormon system of authority, ordinances, and revelation given through Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: The complete work of Christ in his death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: When D&C 35:12 says *only those receiving the 'fulness of the gospel' do good, it means only those accepting Mormonism, not just those believing in Jesus.*

"Gentiles"

In Text: Non-Mormons, including other Christians living in the Americas.

Evangelical: Non-Jewish nations/peoples.

Example: D&C 35:7 speaks of the 'folly and abominations' of the Gentiles, referring to the surrounding Christian culture in 1830 America.

"Translation"

In Text: A charismatic revision or expansion of the text based on inspiration, not linguistic study.

Evangelical: Rendering text from one language to another (e.g., Greek to English).

Example: Joseph Smith's 'translation' of the Bible mentioned in the intro and verse 20 involved adding long passages not found in any ancient manuscripts.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Becoming 'sons of God' through the 'fulness of the gospel' (v2, v12), which includes specific ordinances and knowledge.

How Attained: Through faith, repentance, baptism, reception of the Holy Ghost by authorized laying on of hands, and enduring in covenants.

Basis of Assurance: Conditional upon 'abiding' and keeping commandments (v24). Even the Prophet's standing is conditional (v18).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by stating that faith and water baptism (Sidney's previous state) were insufficient without the additional priesthood ordinance for the Holy Ghost.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Listen to the voice of the Lord (v1)
2. Baptize by water and confer the Holy Ghost (v6)
3. Thresh the nations by the power of the Spirit (v13)
4. Watch over Joseph Smith that his faith fail not (v19)
5. Write (serve as scribe) for Joseph Smith (v20)
6. Tarry with Joseph and forsake him not (v22)
7. Keep all commandments and covenants (v24)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's revisions of the Bible as authoritative scripture
2. Reject previous religious experiences as insufficient
3. View non-Mormon society as 'Babylon' destined for desolation

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by water
2. Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 5, the Lord tells Sidney that his previous baptisms didn't convey the Holy Ghost. Does this mean you believe Christians outside the LDS church do not have the Holy Spirit living in them?
2. Verse 12 says 'there are none that doeth good' except those receiving this gospel. How do you view the sincere charity and faith of non-LDS Christians in light of this verse?
3. Verse 18 suggests Joseph Smith could have been replaced if he didn't abide in Christ. How does this affect your view of the infallibility of the Prophet?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Pre-Restoration Heart – Just as God saw Sidney's heart before he was a Mormon, God sees the seeker's heart today. God acknowledges the desire for truth. [Acts 10:4 (Cornelius' prayers heard before he knew the full gospel)]
2. Weakness made strong – God uses those who are not powerful by worldly standards to display His glory, similar to the Evangelical emphasis on grace. [1 Corinthians 1:27 (God chose the foolish things)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Exclusivity/Isolation [Severe] – The believer is taught that all non-Mormon religious experiences are invalid ('folly and abominations'). This creates a heavy psychological barrier to learning from or fellowshipping with other Christians, leading to spiritual isolation.
2. Uncertainty of Standing [Moderate] – Since the Holy Ghost is tied to a ritual and 'keeping commandments' rather than simple faith, the believer may constantly question if they truly 'have' the Spirit or if they have lost it through unworthiness.
3. Dependency on Hierarchy [Severe] – Salvation is linked to the 'keys' held by Joseph (and successors). The believer cannot approach God fully without the mediation of the church structure.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) confirmed by signs/miracles.

Verification Method: Adherents are told that if they believe and ask in faith, they will see miracles (healing, casting out devils) which serve as confirmation (D&C 35:8-9).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits by Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). D&C 35 encourages testing truth claims via miraculous signs and the 'voice' of the prophet, which Jesus warns against in Matthew 24:24 (false prophets showing great signs).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 7, 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The revelation was recorded by a scribe (likely John Whitmer or Sidney Rigdon). Early manuscript versions vs. printed versions in the Book of Commandments (1833) often show editing by Joseph Smith to clarify or expand theology.