

SECTION 36

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

OVERVIEW

Given in December 1830 near Fayette, New York, Doctrine and Covenants Section 36 addresses Edward Partridge, a recent convert and future first bishop of the LDS Church. The text serves a dual purpose: personal assurance and administrative structure. First, it declares Partridge's sins forgiven and commissions him to preach. Second, and theologically significant, it establishes a hierarchical transmission of pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit). The Lord declares that He will lay His hand upon Partridge 'by the hand of my servant Sidney Rigdon,' explicitly linking the reception of the Holy Ghost to human mediation via authorized priesthood leadership. The revelation expands this principle to a general mandate: all men who embrace this calling must come before Smith and Rigdon to be ordained. It concludes with an eschatological warning to 'save yourselves' from the generation and a promise of Christ's sudden return to His temple.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Edward Partridge, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Jun.

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MEDIATED PNEUMATOLOGY

Assertion: The Holy Spirit is imparted to the believer specifically through the laying on of hands by authorized priesthood leaders (specifically Sidney Rigdon in this context).

"And I will lay my hand upon you by the hand of my servant Sidney Rigdon, and you shall receive my Spirit, the Holy Ghost... (D&C 36:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit is the immediate seal of salvation, indwelling the believer at the moment of regeneration (Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:9). While the laying on of hands appears in Acts, it is not a universal prerequisite for receiving the Spirit (e.g., Acts 10:44, where the Spirit falls on Gentiles before baptism or hands are laid). D&C 36:2 institutionalizes the transmission of the Spirit through the hierarchy ('by the hand of my servant Sidney Rigdon'), effectively making the priesthood the gatekeeper of the Comforter. This shifts the focus from direct access to God through Christ to mediated access through the church structure.

2. HIERARCHICAL ORDINATION

Assertion: Valid ministry requires ordination specifically under the oversight of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.

"That as many as shall come before my servants Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, Jun.... shall be ordained and sent forth (D&C 36:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text mandates that potential missionaries must 'come before' Smith and Rigdon to be ordained. This centralizes authority in two specific individuals, establishing a top-down ecclesiastical structure. In contrast, the New Testament demonstrates a more fluid recognition of gifts and calling, often confirmed by local bodies of elders (1 Timothy 4:14) or direct commission by the Spirit (Acts 13:2), rather than requiring all ministers to be processed by the central apostles (Peter/Paul).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the mediation of grace. In D&C 36, the 'Lord's hand' is functionally equivalent to 'Sidney Rigdon's hand' (v2). This establishes a sacerdotal system where spiritual blessings (the Holy Ghost) are dispensed through a priesthood hierarchy. Evangelical theology asserts that there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5), and that the Spirit is a gift of faith, not a result of ritual manipulation by human leaders. Furthermore, the command to 'save yourselves' (v6), while biblically phrased, in this context implies a synergistic salvation requiring gathering and priesthood ordinances.

Shared Values:

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

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Restricts the administration of the Spirit and the authority to preach to those ordained by specific leaders.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Implies the Holy Spirit (and thus full salvation/sanctification) is received through the work of a ritual (laying on of hands) rather than faith alone.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new commandments and 'Thus saith the Lord' revelations outside the biblical canon.

Semantic Warnings:

"Temple"

In Text: A physical structure to be built for Christ's return and ordinances (implied Kirtland/Zion).

Evangelical: In the New Covenant, the temple is the body of the believer (1 Cor 6:19) and the collective Church (Eph 2:21), not a physical building.

Example: *D&C 36:8 'I will suddenly come to my temple' vs Acts 17:24 'God... dwelleth not in temples made with hands.'*

"Priesthood/Ordained"

In Text: Specific authority granted by laying on of hands by Smith/Rigdon to preach and administer.

Evangelical: The priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9), where all Christians have access to God and a commission to share the Gospel.

Example: *D&C 36:5 requires coming before Smith/Rigdon for ordination; 1 Peter 2:5 calls all believers a 'holy priesthood.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Forgiveness of sins (v1) coupled with a command to 'save yourselves' (v6) by gathering and obeying the priesthood.

How Attained: Forgiveness is declared by the Lord, but the reception of the Spirit and the 'peaceable things' requires the laying on of hands by the hierarchy.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is derived from the prophetic declaration ('your sins are forgiven you') and the subsequent emotional experience of the Spirit.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text commands 'save yourselves' and requires ritual ordination for the Spirit. Evangelicalism teaches 'by grace you have been saved through faith... not of works' (Eph 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Preach the gospel 'as with the voice of a trump'
2. Declare 'Hosanna, blessed be the name of the most high God'
3. Come before Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith for ordination
4. Cry repentance
5. Gird up your loins

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the authority of Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith
2. Accept the laying on of hands as necessary for the Spirit

Ritual Requirements:

1. Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost
2. Ordination to the priesthood/ministry

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, it says the Lord lays His hand on Edward 'by the hand of my servant Sidney Rigdon.' How does this relate to the biblical promise that the Spirit is given to those who believe (Galatians 3:2)?
2. The text commands the elders to 'save yourselves.' How do you interpret that in light of the biblical teaching that Jesus is the one who saves us because we cannot save ourselves?
3. If the Holy Spirit teaches the 'peaceable things of the kingdom,' can a person know those things before they are ordained by the priesthood?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Peaceable Things of the Kingdom – The text identifies a deep human longing for peace and kingdom knowledge. This points to the true peace Christ offers. [John 14:27 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth...']
2. Forgiveness of Sins – The immediate declaration of forgiveness highlights the believer's need for assurance. [1 John 1:9 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – The believer is conditioned to believe they cannot fully receive the Spirit or please God without the specific intervention of church leaders (Rigdon/Smith). This creates a spiritual bottleneck and fear of being cut off from the flow of grace if one is at odds with leadership.
2. Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The command to 'save yourselves' (v6) places the onus of escape from the world on the individual's effort and obedience to the gathering command, rather than resting in the finished work of Christ.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Pneumatic Experience (Holy Ghost teaching peaceable things).

Verification Method: The text implies verification comes through the experience of the 'peaceable things of the kingdom' taught by the Spirit *after* submission to the ordinance.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the objective standard of written Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). Here, truth is established by a new revelation that validates itself through subjective experience following obedience to leaders.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 9, 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Early manuscripts of D&C often underwent revision before the 1835 publication. This section reflects the early 'Kirtland era' theology where Rigdon was a co-dominant figure.