

SECTION 4

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 4 is one of the most frequently cited texts in Mormon missiology, originally dictated by Joseph Smith in February 1829 for his father, Joseph Smith Sr. It announces the commencement of a 'marvelous work' (the Restoration) and issues a call to labor. The text is pivotal because it establishes the criteria for the Mormon priesthood and missionary force. It utilizes agricultural metaphors ('field is white already to harvest') to describe the urgency of the work. Theologically, it is significant for establishing a conditional framework for justification: the adherent is told that serving with 'all' their heart, might, mind, and strength is the requisite condition to 'stand blameless before God at the last day.' Furthermore, it suggests that the act of laboring in this cause is the mechanism by which the laborer 'bringeth salvation to his soul,' fusing soteriology with ecclesiastical service.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Joseph Smith Sr. (The Recipient)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGICAL LABOR

Assertion: Personal salvation is secured through the intensity of one's service in the 'marvelous work.'

"he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might... bringeth salvation to his soul (D&C 4:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, salvation is accomplished solely by Christ's finished work and received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The believer works **because** they are saved, not **to be** saved. D&C 4:4 inverts this order, stating that the laborer 'bringeth salvation to his soul' through the act of thrusting in the sickle. This establishes a merit-based system where the efficacy of salvation is contingent upon the 'might' of the laborer rather than the sufficiency of the Savior.

2. CONDITIONAL BLAMELESSNESS

Assertion: Standing blameless before God is contingent upon serving with total capacity ('all' heart, might, mind, strength).

"serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day. (D&C 4:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text uses the clause 'that ye may stand blameless' as a result clause dependent on the command to serve with 'all' faculties. This implies that any deficiency in service—serving with only 99% of one's might—jeopardizes one's standing before God. In contrast, the Evangelical baseline asserts that believers stand blameless solely because they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), independent of the intensity of their service.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the ethical list in verse 6 mirrors 2 Peter 1, the surrounding context fundamentally alters the motivation and mechanism of salvation. D&C 4:2 and 4:4 create a 'conditional covenant' where the human agent's 'all' is the prerequisite for justification ('standing blameless'). This violates Sola Fide and Sola Gratia. The Evangelical baseline asserts that no human can serve with 'all' their might due to the fall (Romans 3:23), necessitating a Savior who fulfilled the law on our behalf. D&C 4 places the burden of fulfilling the law of total service back onto the individual.

Shared Values:

Importance of serving God; Necessity of Christian virtues (faith, hope, charity); Urgency of evangelism/harvest; Prayer (Ask/Knock)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly linked to the effort of the laborer ('thrusteth in his sickle... bringeth salvation to his soul').
2. [Major] Christology – The text shifts the focus of 'saving' from Christ's atonement to the missionary's labor.
3. [Major] Anthropology (Human Nature) – Assumes humans are capable of serving with 'all' heart/might/mind/strength without the regenerating power of the Gospel preceding the work.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: A state achieved by the laborer preventing themselves from 'perishing' through their own work (v4).

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death accomplished wholly by Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

Example: *In D&C 4:4, the subject (the laborer) acts to bring salvation to himself. In Titus 3:5, God saves us 'not by works of righteousness which we have done.'*

"Called"

In Text: Based on having 'desires' to serve (v3).

Evangelical: Often refers to effectual calling by God (Romans 8:30) or specific vocational appointment, not merely subjective desire.

Example: *D&C 4:3 implies anyone with a desire is authorized/called. Hebrews 5:4 implies priesthood authority is not self-assumed.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Standing blameless at the last day; not perishing.

How Attained: By embarking in the service of God with all heart, might, mind, and strength.

Basis of Assurance: The intensity of one's own labor and the acquisition of specific virtues.

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 4:4 ('bringeth salvation to his soul' by working) is the antithesis of Ephesians 2:8-9 ('not of works, lest any man should boast').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Serve God with all heart, might, mind, and strength
2. Thrust in the sickle with might
3. Ask and knock
4. Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence

Implicit Obligations:

1. Participation in missionary work
2. Self-perfection of character attributes
3. Total dedication of personal resources to the church's cause

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, it says we must serve with 'all' our heart, might, mind, and strength to stand blameless. How do you determine when you have truly given 'all'?
2. Verse 4 says the laborer 'bringeth salvation to his soul' by his work. How does this fit with the idea that Jesus is the one who brings salvation to us?
3. If standing blameless depends on my service intensity (v2), what happens on the days when I am weak or fail to serve with 'all' my strength?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire to be Blameless – The text correctly identifies the human need to be blameless before God. The Gospel fulfills this not through our 'all' (which is never enough), but through Christ's 'all' on the cross. [Colossians 1:22]
2. The White Field – Acknowledges the urgency of the spiritual state of humanity. We agree the world needs the Gospel; the difference is *what* Gospel we are harvesting them into. [Matthew 9:37-38]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The qualifier 'all' (heart, might, mind, strength) creates an impossible standard. A conscientious believer can never be certain they have exerted 'all' their strength, leading to chronic guilt and insecurity regarding their standing before God.
2. Self-Saviorship [Severe] – By stating the laborer 'bringeth salvation to his soul' through work, the text places the weight of eternity on the individual's performance. If they fail to work hard enough, they logically bear the responsibility for their own damnation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Subjective Desire (the adherent).

Verification Method: The presence of 'desires to serve' (v3) is the verification of the call.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) and the internal witness of the Spirit regarding Christ (Romans 8:16), not merely a subjective desire to perform religious labor.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was received before the Book of Mormon was completed or the priesthood formally restored (May 1829), yet it outlines qualifications for ministry.