

SECTION 41

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

OVERVIEW

Given in February 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio, Doctrine and Covenants Section 41 marks a pivotal moment in the administrative and theological development of early Mormonism. Joseph Smith had recently arrived from New York, and the church needed structural organization. The text presents the voice of the Lord commanding the elders to assemble to receive 'my law' (foreshadowing Section 42), implying that biblical precedent was insufficient for their governance. It establishes a binary definition of discipleship: those who receive and do the law are disciples; those who do not are to be 'cast out.' The revelation also addresses practical logistics, commanding the construction of a house for Joseph Smith where he can live and 'translate' (referring to his revision of the Bible). Finally, it establishes the office of the Bishop, calling Edward Partridge to leave his business ('merchandise') and devote himself fully to the church's labor, comparing his integrity to Nathanael of the New Testament.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith, Edward Partridge, Sidney Rigdon, Nathanael (Biblical allusion)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

Assertion: True discipleship is defined strictly by receiving and doing the law; failure results in being cast out.

"He that receiveth my law and doeth it, the same is my disciple; and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple, and shall be cast out from among you (D&C 41:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, a disciple is a follower of Christ whose standing is secured by justification by faith (Romans 5:1). While obedience is a fruit of salvation, it is not the cause of retaining one's status as a child of God. D&C 41:5 creates a precarious standing where a believer's status as a 'disciple' is contingent upon successful performance of the law. The threat of being 'cast out' suggests a loss of community and spiritual standing based on behavioral failure, whereas the Bible emphasizes discipline for restoration (1 Corinthians 5:5) and the security of the believer in Christ (John 10:28).

2. CONTINUING REVELATION (OPEN CANON)

Assertion: The Church requires new, specific laws revealed through the prophet to govern itself properly.

"ye shall receive my law, that ye may know how to govern my church (D&C 41:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: The premise of D&C 41 is that the Bible is insufficient for the governance of the church in the 'latter days.' The text commands the elders to pray to receive a *new* law (which becomes D&C 42). For Evangelicals, the New Testament epistles (1 Timothy, Titus) provide the complete and sufficient instruction for church governance (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The claim that a new law is needed implies a deficiency in the completed work of the Apostles.

3. THE OFFICE OF BISHOP

Assertion: God calls specific individuals to the office of Bishop to manage church affairs and labor full-time.

"ordained a bishop unto the church, to leave his merchandise and to spend all his time in the labors of the church (D&C 41:9)"

Evangelical Comparison: In the New Testament, 'bishop' (episkopos) is synonymous with 'elder' (presbyteros) and 'shepherd' (poimen), referring to the spiritual leaders of a congregation (Acts 20:17, 28). In D&C 41, the office is introduced as a distinct calling involving the management of temporal things (implied by leaving 'merchandise'). While Partridge is called to full-time service here, the role in Mormonism evolves into a lay priesthood office distinct from the biblical pastoral model.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 41 widens the theological gap by institutionalizing the need for a modern prophet to generate binding 'law' for the church, effectively displacing the sufficiency of the New Testament. Furthermore, the soteriological framework presented is highly conditional. While Evangelicals view church discipline as a means of restoration for a believer who is already justified, D&C 41 frames being 'cast out' and receiving 'cursings' as the direct result of failing to perfectly 'do' the law. This introduces a 'High-Stakes' religion where security is found in performance rather than the finished work of Christ.

Shared Values:

Desire for church order; Importance of prayer; Value of integrity ('no guile'); Belief in the Second Coming ('I come quickly', v4)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the need for new, binding 'laws' beyond the Bible to govern the church.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Conditions discipleship and avoiding 'cursings' on strict obedience to the law ('doeth it').
3. [Minor] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchical priesthood office (Bishop) mediated through the prophet's command.

Semantic Warnings:

"Disciple"

In Text: One who receives the new law and strictly obeys it; failure results in expulsion.

Evangelical: A learner/follower of Jesus, whose status is based on faith, though evidenced by fruit (John 8:31, 13:35).

Example: In D&C 41:5, a *disciple* is defined by the action of keeping the specific new laws given to Smith. In Evangelicalism, a *disciple* is one who trusts in Christ.

"Bishop"

In Text: A specific priesthood office (Edward Partridge) focused on temporal administration and full-time labor.

Evangelical: An overseer/pastor (1 Timothy 3:1-7) responsible for teaching and shepherding the flock.

Example: Partridge is called to leave his business to manage church properties/finances (temporal), whereas biblical bishops are primarily spiritual shepherds.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as remaining in the church ('not cast out') and avoiding the 'heaviest of all cursings'.

How Attained: Through hearing, hearkening, and 'doing' the law given by the prophet.

Basis of Assurance: Performance-based: 'He that receiveth my law and doeth it... is my disciple.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by threatening 'cursings' on those who profess but do not perform. Romans 8:1 offers 'no condemnation' for those in Christ; D&C 41:1 offers 'heaviest cursings' for those who fail to hearken.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Assemble to agree upon the word (v2)
2. Pray to receive the law (v3)
3. Build a house for Joseph Smith to live and translate in (v7)
4. Appoint and ordain Edward Partridge as bishop (v9)
5. Edward Partridge must leave his merchandise/business (v9)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's translations as authoritative work

2. Submit to the new 'law' once it is given
3. Maintain worthiness to avoid being 'cast out'

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination of a Bishop (v9)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 1, the Lord mentions the 'heaviest of all cursings' for those who profess His name but don't hearken. How does that make you feel about your own standing with God when you struggle to obey?
2. Verse 5 says a disciple is one who receives the law and *does* it. How do you balance the need to 'do' the law with the biblical teaching that we are saved by grace through faith, not of works?
3. Why do you think the Lord felt it necessary to give a new 'law' to govern the church (v3) rather than relying on the instructions already in the New Testament?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Pure Heart (Nathanael) – The text values a heart without deceit. This connects to the Gospel truth that God looks at the heart. However, only Jesus can truly purify the heart. [Psalm 51:10 'Create in me a pure heart, O God.' Acts 15:9 '...purifying their hearts by faith.]
2. The Desire for Law/Governance – The desire for order and righteousness is good. The Gospel fulfills this not with a new legal code, but with the Law of the Spirit of Life. [Romans 8:2 'For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Cursing [Severe] – The text opens with a threat of the 'heaviest of all cursings' for those who profess but fail to hearken. This instills a deep-seated fear that one's profession of faith is insufficient without perfect compliance.
2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – By defining a disciple strictly as one who 'doeth' the law, the adherent is placed on a treadmill of performance where their identity as a disciple is constantly at risk of being invalidated.
3. Financial/Temporal Pressure [Moderate] – The command to build a house for the leader and for Partridge to leave his business sets a precedent for high temporal demands on the laity to support the hierarchy.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) confirmed by the 'prayer of faith' (v3).

Verification Method: Adherents are told to assemble and pray to receive the law, implying a subjective spiritual confirmation of the prophet's words.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests new claims against the fixed standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11). D&C 41 establishes a system where the standard is the living prophet's utterance, verified by subjective experience rather than objective scriptural alignment.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 4, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Early manuscripts show minor variations typical of dictation. The command for Joseph to 'translate' (v7) is a significant historical marker for the JST project.