

SECTION 44

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 44, received in February 1831, addresses the practical and spiritual necessities of the early Latter-day Saint movement in Kirtland, Ohio. The text commands a gathering of elders from all directions to a specific conference. Theologically, it posits a conditional outpouring of the Holy Spirit, predicated on the elders' faithfulness and their act of assembling. Practically, the revelation instructs the church to organize according to the 'laws of man' (civil law), a directive aimed at securing legal standing to protect the community from growing external hostility ('enemies'). It concludes with a mandate to care for the poor, serving as a transitional instruction until the 'law' (the Law of Consecration, outlined in D&C 42) could be fully implemented. This section highlights the interplay between spiritual charismatic claims and the pragmatic need for institutional survival.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Elders of the Church

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL PNEUMATOLOGY

Assertion: The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is contingent upon the faithfulness of the elders and their obedience to the command to assemble.

"inasmuch as they are faithful, and exercise faith in me, I will pour out my Spirit upon them in the day that they assemble themselves together (D&C 44:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the presence of the Holy Spirit is transactional: 'inasmuch as they are faithful... I will pour out.' This suggests the Spirit's power is a response to human merit or obedience. In contrast, Evangelical theology asserts that the Holy Spirit is the 'down payment' or seal of redemption given to every believer at the moment of justification (Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:9). While the **filling** of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) relates to Christian living, the **presence** of the Spirit is a gift of grace, not a result of 'exercising faith' in a specific ritual gathering.

2. THEOCRATIC PRAGMATISM

Assertion: The church must utilize secular laws ('laws of man') to protect the divine mission and ensure the ability to keep God's laws.

"organize yourselves according to the laws of man; That your enemies may not have power over you (D&C 44:4-5)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text instructs the early Saints to incorporate or organize legally not just for order, but as a defensive measure against 'enemies' so they can 'be enabled to keep my laws.' This reflects the Mormon worldview where the Kingdom of God is a literal, political, and social organization that requires earthly protection to function. Evangelicalism generally views the Church as a spiritual body that transcends political safety; the ability to obey God is granted by the Spirit, regardless of political oppression (Acts 5:29).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 44 illustrates the fundamental gap in authority and pneumatology. Authority in this text is derived from Joseph Smith's ability to channel the voice of God ('Thus saith the Lord') to direct administrative affairs, whereas Evangelicalism locates authority in the fixed biblical text. Furthermore, the pneumatology here is highly conditional; the Spirit is 'poured out' **inasmuch** as the elders are faithful. This creates a works-based maintenance of spiritual standing. Finally, the missiology is distinct: preaching repentance in this context is a call to join the restoration movement and its ordinances, not merely a call to faith in Christ.

Shared Values:

Care for the poor and needy; Preaching repentance; Obedience to civil law (generally)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Joseph Smith speaks in the first person as God, adding new commandments and promises to the canon.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – The outpouring of the Spirit is conditioned on human faithfulness ('inasmuch as they are faithful').
3. [Minor] Theology of the Cross – Focuses on legal maneuvering to avoid 'enemies' and 'bonds' rather than a theology of suffering or reliance on God's sovereignty in persecution.

Semantic Warnings:

"Elders"

In Text: A specific office in the Melchizedek Priesthood held by most adult males.

Evangelical: Spiritual overseers/pastors of a local congregation (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1).

Example: In D&C 44, 'elders' are a mass group called to assemble, whereas in the Bible, elders are select leaders of local bodies.

"Repentance"

In Text: Turning away from sin and turning toward the restoration gospel and its ordinances.

Evangelical: A change of mind (metanoia) resulting in turning from sin to God through faith in Christ.

Example: Preaching repentance in D&C 44:3 implies bringing people into the organizational structure of the LDS church.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering, obedience to the prophet, and keeping the law.

How Attained: Through faithfulness, gathering, and administering relief as commanded.

Basis of Assurance: The tangible experience of the Spirit at the conference and protection from enemies.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'exercising faith' as a work that produces a result (Spirit), rather than faith as a resting trust in Christ's finished work (Romans 4:5).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Call elders together from east, west, north, and south
2. Go forth and preach repentance
3. Organize according to the laws of man
4. Visit the poor and needy
5. Administer to the relief of the poor

Implicit Obligations:

1. Exercise faith specifically for the success of the conference
2. Maintain a defensive posture against 'enemies'
3. Submit to the central coordination of the church leadership

Ritual Requirements:

1. Assembly/Conference attendance

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, the Lord says he will pour out his Spirit 'inasmuch as they are faithful.' How do you gauge if you have been faithful enough to warrant the Spirit's presence?
2. The text mentions organizing according to man's laws to be preserved from enemies. How does this compare to Jesus' teaching that his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36)?

3. Verse 6 commands caring for the poor. Do you see this as a requirement for salvation or a fruit of having already been saved?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Protection – The text highlights a human longing for safety from enemies. The Gospel answers this not with legal maneuvering, but with the ultimate security found in Christ, who defeated the ultimate enemy (death/sin). [Romans 8:31, 37-39 ('If God is for us, who can be against us?')]
2. Gathering – The desire to gather reflects the biblical truth that we are designed for community. However, the true gathering is to the person of Christ, not a geographic location. [Matthew 18:20 ('For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Anxiety [Moderate] – The phrase 'inasmuch as they are faithful' places the burden of the Spirit's presence on the individual's performance. If a believer feels dry or distant from God, the text implies it is due to a lack of their own faithfulness.
2. Siege Mentality [Moderate] – The focus on 'enemies,' 'bonds,' and the need for legal protection fosters a worldview of persecution and isolation, creating fear of the outside world.
3. Performance [Mild] – The command to 'visit the poor' is framed as a requirement to 'keep my law,' turning charity into a legal obligation rather than a joyful response to grace.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Pragmatic outcome (protection from enemies) and experiential confirmation (pouring out of Spirit at the conference).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective truth of the written Word (2 Timothy 3:16) illuminated by the Spirit, rather than new subjective revelations delivered through a modern prophet.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Early manuscripts may show minor variations in wording compared to the 2013 edition, typical of D&C editing history.