

SECTION 46

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 46, received in March 1831, addresses two primary issues facing the early Latter-day Saint movement in Kirtland, Ohio: the conduct of public meetings and the regulation of spiritual manifestations. Historically, this revelation was a response to early converts engaging in chaotic spiritual enthusiasm (excessive emotionalism or strange behaviors) and a tendency to exclude non-believers from meetings. The text commands that meetings be conducted by the Holy Spirit and explicitly forbids excluding earnest seekers. It then provides a detailed pneumatology, listing various gifts of the Spirit similar to 1 Corinthians 12, such as wisdom, knowledge, healing, and tongues. Crucially, it introduces a distinct hierarchical control mechanism: while gifts are distributed among the laity, the 'bishop... and elders' are granted the specific gift to 'discern all those gifts.' This establishes a theological framework where spiritual experiences are valid only when ratified by priesthood leadership, ostensibly to protect the flock from 'doctrines of devils' and seducing spirits. It emphasizes that these gifts are conditional, reserved for those who 'love me and keep all my commandments.'

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), The Bishop (Edward Partridge, implied), Elders of the Church, Seekers/Investigators

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. HIERARCHICAL DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

Assertion: While members may receive various gifts, the Bishop and appointed elders possess the specific authority and ability to discern whether these gifts are of God or of the devil.

"And unto the bishop of the church... are to have it given unto them to discern all those gifts lest there shall be any among you professing and yet be not of God. (D&C 46:27)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, discernment is a function of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, available to every believer (1 John 2:27, Acts 17:11). While pastors have a role in guarding doctrine, they do not possess a mystical monopoly on discerning the source of spiritual manifestations. D&C 46:27 centralizes this power in the office of the Bishop, creating a dependency where the laity's spiritual experiences require validation by the hierarchy. This shifts the locus of authority from the objective standard of Scripture to the subjective discernment of a leader.

2. CONDITIONAL GRACE FOR GIFTS

Assertion: Spiritual gifts are given specifically to those who love God and 'keep all my commandments,' or those seeking to do so.

"For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do (D&C 46:9)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Bible describes spiritual gifts as 'charismata' (grace-gifts) given 'as he wills' (1 Corinthians 12:11), often irrespective of the recipient's moral perfection (as seen in the gifted but carnal Corinthian church). D&C 46:9 links the receipt of these gifts to moral performance ('keep all my commandments'). This introduces a merit-based framework to pneumatology, suggesting that the presence of power is a validation of the individual's righteousness, whereas the Bible distinguishes between a believer's standing in grace and their operational ministry.

3. VICARIOUS FAITH

Assertion: Some individuals are not given the knowledge of Christ directly but are given the gift to believe on the words of others to attain eternal life.

"To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful. (D&C 46:14)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Romans 10:17 states faith comes by hearing, Evangelical theology holds that saving faith involves a personal trust in Christ, confirmed by the Holy Spirit to the individual believer. D&C 46:14 codifies a 'gift' of believing on *others'* words as a sufficient basis for eternal life (contingent on faithfulness). This elevates the role of the 'testifier' (prophet/missionary) and allows for a derivative faith that rests on human authority rather than a direct, unmediated relationship with Christ.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the list of gifts mirrors 1 Corinthians 12, the theological infrastructure is fundamentally different. Evangelicalism posits that the Bible is the final arbiter of truth and that the Holy Spirit indwells all believers, enabling them to discern truth. D&C 46 posits a world where 'doctrines of devils' are so prevalent that a specific priesthood office (Bishop) is required to mediate spiritual reality for the congregation. Furthermore, the text links the receipt of gifts to 'keeping all commandments,' subtly shifting the basis of spiritual operation from grace (unmerited favor) to merit (obedience).

Shared Values:

Belief in the Holy Spirit; Practice of spiritual gifts (continuationism); Importance of prayer; Openness of worship services; Desire for holiness

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text claims to be a new, binding revelation from God, expanding the canon beyond the Bible.
- 2. [Major] Sola Fide – Blessings and eternal life are conditioned on 'keeping all commandments' and 'continuing faithful' rather than faith alone.
- 3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where the Bishop holds the keys to discern the validity of the laity's spiritual gifts.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gifts"

In Text: Manifestations of the Spirit given to those who keep commandments, subject to Bishop's approval.
Evangelical: Charismata (grace endowments) given by the Spirit's sovereign will for the edification of the body (1 Cor 12:11).
Example: *In D&C 46, a member might fear they lack a gift because they haven't 'kept all commandments.' In the Bible, a carnal Corinthian could still exercise a gift, showing gifts aren't badges of moral perfection.*

"Salvation/Eternal Life"

In Text: A state achieved 'if they continue faithful' (v14), implying a probationary state dependent on human endurance.
Evangelical: A present possession of the believer secured by Christ's work (John 5:24).
Example: *D&C 46:14 conditions eternal life on 'continuing faithful,' whereas Ephesians 2:8-9 conditions it on 'grace through faith.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Eternal life is the goal, linked to knowing Christ or believing testimony.

How Attained: Through faith, seeking the kingdom, and specifically 'if they continue faithful' (v14) and 'keep all my commandments' (v9).

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tentative, based on current faithfulness and the possession of spiritual gifts as evidence of God's favor.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by adding the clause 'if they continue faithful' (v14) and linking spiritual access to 'keeping all commandments' (v9). Biblical salvation is a gift received, not a status maintained by performance (Galatians 3:3).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Conduct meetings as directed by the Holy Spirit (v2)
2. Do not cast anyone out of public or sacrament meetings (v3-6)
3. Ask of God for gifts (v7)
4. Seek earnestly the best gifts (v8)
5. Practice virtue and holiness continually (v33)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit spiritual experiences to the Bishop for verification
2. Maintain moral worthiness to qualify for spiritual gifts
3. Avoid asking for signs to satisfy lusts

Ritual Requirements:

1. Sacrament meetings (v4)
2. Confirmation meetings (v6)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 9, it says gifts are for those who 'keep all my commandments.' How do you handle the pressure of needing to keep *all* commandments to experience God's power?
2. Verse 14 mentions having eternal life 'if they continue faithful.' How do you define 'faithful enough' to be sure of your standing with God?
3. The text warns about being seduced by evil spirits (v7). How does the Bishop discerning your gifts (v27) give you peace compared to testing things against the Bible yourself?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Fear of Deception – The text highlights a valid fear of spiritual deception. The Gospel offers the objective truth of Christ's finished work and the written Word as a sure anchor, rather than the shifting sands of subjective feelings or human leaders. [Hebrews 6:19 (Hope as an anchor), 2 Timothy 3:16-17]
2. The Desire for Gifts – The desire for God's power is good. The Gospel fulfills this not by making us earn it, but by giving us the greatest gift—the Holy Spirit Himself—upon believing. [Luke 11:13, Ephesians 1:13-14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must 'keep all commandments' to qualify for spiritual gifts. This creates a cycle where a lack of miracles or gifts is interpreted as a personal moral failure or hidden sin.
2. Fear of Deception [Moderate] – The text paints a picture of a spiritual minefield ('evil spirits', 'doctrines of devils') that requires constant vigilance and dependence on leaders, fostering anxiety rather than the peace of Christ.
3. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – By placing discernment in the hands of the Bishop, the individual is disempowered and must rely on an external human authority to validate their personal spiritual walk.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective spiritual experience (gifts) validated by hierarchical authority (Bishop).

Verification Method: Adherents seek gifts through prayer and obedience; the Bishop verifies the source (God vs. Devil).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture to test spirits (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). D&C 46 relies on a combination of subjective feeling ('the Spirit testifies') and authoritarian confirmation ('unto the bishop... to discern').

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 8, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The 1833 Book of Commandments version differs slightly from the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants version, reflecting the evolving church structure (addition of 'Bishop' role clarity).