

SECTION 60

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 60, dated August 8, 1831, captures a moment of transition for the early Latter-day Saint elders. Having dedicated the temple site in Independence, Missouri, they are instructed to return to Kirtland, Ohio. The text opens with a divine rebuke: while the Lord is pleased with their journey, He is angry with some elders who failed to preach due to the 'fear of man,' equating this silence to hiding a talent (a reference to Matthew 25). The revelation provides specific logistical instructions, commanding Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Oliver Cowdery to travel by river to Cincinnati to preach, while others travel two by two. A significant theological development in this text is the command to 'wash their feet' as a secret testimony against those who reject their message. This ritual act is presented as a seal of judgment for the 'day of judgment.' The text underscores the authority of Joseph Smith to direct the movements of the church leaders and frames missionary work not merely as an invitation, but as a solemn obligation where failure invites divine wrath and the loss of spiritual standing.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Joseph Smith, Jun., Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, Edward Partridge

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL DIVINE FAVOR BASED ON EVANGELISM

Assertion: God's anger is kindled against believers who fail to preach or 'open their mouths' due to fear.

"But with some I am not well pleased, for they will not open their mouths... Wo unto such, for mine anger is kindled against them. (D&C 60:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, justification is a settled legal status based on the finished work of Christ (Romans 8:1). While believers are commanded to share the gospel, their standing before God is not jeopardized by moments of fear or silence. D&C 60:2-3, however, introduces a 'Wo' and a threat that 'it shall be taken away, even that which they have,' implying a loss of spiritual standing or authority based on performance failure. This shifts the motivation for evangelism from gratitude to fear of divine retribution.

2. RITUAL CURSING/JUDGMENT

Assertion: Missionaries are authorized to perform a secret ritual of washing feet to testify against those who reject their message.

"And shake off the dust of thy feet against those who receive thee not... and wash thy feet, as a testimony against them in the day of judgment. (D&C 60:15)"

Evangelical Comparison: Jesus instructed disciples to shake the dust off their feet (Matthew 10:14) as a sign that they had fulfilled their duty and the hearers were now responsible for their own reaction. However, D&C 60 elevates this to a ritualistic act ('wash thy feet') done 'in secret' specifically 'as a testimony against them.' This places the missionary in a judicial role, actively participating in the condemnation of the hearer, which conflicts with the Evangelical understanding of the ambassadorial role of the evangelist who pleads for reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20) rather than sealing judgment.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the nature of the mission and the message. In D&C 60, the 'gospel' includes the specific authority claims of Joseph Smith, and the 'wicked' are the general populace (including Christians) of St. Louis and Cincinnati. The text violates the Evangelical understanding of the Age of Grace by instituting a ritual (washing feet) that seals testimony *against* people, rather than simply proclaiming the offer of grace. Furthermore, the text implies that God's forgiveness (v7) is intertwined with their obedience to these specific travel commands, blurring the lines between justification and sanctification.

Shared Values:

Importance of evangelism; Warning against the 'fear of man'; Belief in the Second Coming ('day when I shall make up my jewels'); Stewardship of talents

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Joseph Smith speaks in the first person as God ('I, the Lord'), adding new commandments and rituals not found in the Bible.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – God's pleasure and the retention of one's spiritual standing ('it shall be taken away') are conditioned on the work of preaching.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood / Grace – Establishes a hierarchy where elders have the power to ritually testify against people, effectively acting as judges.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Wicked"

In Text: The general population of Missouri, Illinois, and Ohio who are not part of the restored Church.

Evangelical: Usually refers to the unrighteous or those in rebellion against God; here it is applied broadly to non-Mormons, including other Christians.

Example: *Preach 'among the congregations of the wicked' (v8) refers to preaching in the Protestant churches and towns along the river.*

"Talent"

In Text: Specifically the priesthood authority and commission to preach the restored gospel.

Evangelical: In Matt 25, refers to resources/opportunities entrusted by God; here it is narrowly defined as the Mormon missionary mandate.

Example: *Hide the talent... because of the fear of man (v2).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as being part of the 'jewels' of God (v4) and having sins forgiven (v7).

How Attained: Forgiveness is declared in the context of obedience to the mission and following the prophet's travel commands.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tied to the 'pleasure' of the Lord, which is contingent on not hiding the talent (preaching).

Comparison to Sola Fide: In D&C 60:2, God is 'not well pleased' with those who don't work (preach). In Evangelicalism, God is pleased with the believer because of Christ's work (Matthew 3:17, Ephesians 1:6). The text shifts the basis of God's pleasure from Christ's propitiation to the believer's performance.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Return speedily to Ohio (v1)
2. Obtain a craft (boat) for the journey (v5)
3. Preach in Cincinnati (v6-7)
4. Preach to congregations of the wicked (v8)
5. Do not idle away time (v13)
6. Wash feet as a testimony against rejecters (v15)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Financial sharing among missionaries (Edward Partridge commanded to share funds)
2. Strict obedience to logistical commands given through the prophet

Ritual Requirements:

1. Washing of feet (in secret) as a testimony against those who reject the gospel

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, God says He is angry with those who didn't preach because of fear. How do you deal with the anxiety of wondering if you've been bold enough to avoid God's anger?
2. Verse 7 says 'your sins are forgiven you' in the context of their mission trip. Do you believe forgiveness is based on serving the mission, or is it a settled reality because of the Cross?
3. When the text talks about washing feet as a testimony *against* people (v15), how does that fit with Jesus' command to bless those who curse us?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Lord making up His Jewels – This expresses a longing to be treasured by God. In the Gospel, we become His treasure not by our polishing (works), but by His purchase. [1 Peter 2:9 'But you are a chosen people... God's special possession.']
2. The desire for forgiveness – The text offers forgiveness amidst labor. The Gospel offers forgiveness as the *starting point* of labor. [Colossians 2:13-14 'He forgave us all our sins...']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The believer must constantly assess if they have 'opened their mouth' enough. Silence is not just a missed opportunity; it is a sin that kindles God's anger.
2. Fear of Loss [Severe] – The threat that 'it shall be taken away, even that which they have' (v3) creates insecurity about one's spiritual standing and calling.
3. Burden of Judgment [Moderate] – The command to wash feet against others places the heavy psychological burden of condemning others on the missionary, rather than leaving judgment to God.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the prophet's voice is equated with obeying God; verification is often pragmatic (success in the mission) or internal spiritual confirmation.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). Here, truth is dynamic and situational, coming through a living channel (Joseph Smith) rather than a fixed text.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 8, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Early manuscripts show minor variations common to the compilation of the Book of Commandments and later D&C editions, primarily in punctuation and versification.