

SECTION 64

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

OVERVIEW

Given in September 1831, Doctrine and Covenants Section 64 addresses internal strife and external pressures facing the early Latter-day Saint movement in Kirtland, Ohio. The text opens with a divine mandate for the Saints to forgive one another unconditionally, asserting that while God may judge, humans who refuse forgiveness commit a 'greater sin' than the original offense. It reaffirms Joseph Smith's authority, noting that he holds the 'keys of the mysteries' as long as he abides by God's ordinances, acknowledging his personal flaws while upholding his prophetic office. A central theological claim is found in verse 23, which explicitly links the payment of tithing to protection from 'burning' at the Second Coming, framing financial obedience as an eschatological shield. The revelation also deals with practical stewardship, debt, and the identification of the 'rebellious' who are not of the 'blood of Ephraim,' concluding with a vision of the Church as a judge over the nations.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Ezra Booth, Isaac Morley, Edward Partridge, Sidney Gilbert, Frederick G. Williams, Newel K. Whitney

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGICAL TITHING (FIRE INSURANCE)

Assertion: Payment of tithing provides physical and spiritual safety from judgment (burning) at the Second Coming.

"behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming. (D&C 64:23)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, safety from the wrath of God (eschatological judgment) is secured solely through the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:10). D&C 64:23 introduces a transactional element where financial obedience ('he that is tithed') is the specific condition for not being 'burned.' This parallels medieval indulgences or simony, where material offering secures spiritual benefit, violating the principle of Sola Gratia (Grace Alone).

2. UNIVERSAL OBLIGATORY FORGIVENESS

Assertion: Humans are required to forgive all people regardless of repentance; failure to do so is a sin greater than the offense suffered.

"I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. ... for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. (D&C 64:9-10)"

Evangelical Comparison: Biblical teaching emphasizes forgiveness as a response to God's grace (Ephesians 4:32). However, D&C 64 creates a legalistic hierarchy of sin where the lack of forgiveness is 'the greater sin.' This places an immense psychological burden on victims of abuse or trauma. While Jesus warns about unforgiveness (Matthew 6:15), the specific formulation that the victim carries 'greater' guilt than the aggressor is unique to this text and foreign to the biblical concept of justice.

3. LINEAGE-BASED STANDING (BLOOD OF EPHRAIM)

Assertion: Faithfulness is linked to the lineage of Ephraim; the rebellious are identified as not being of this blood.

"For, verily I say that the rebellious are not of the blood of Ephraim, wherefore they shall be plucked out. (D&C 64:36)"

Evangelical Comparison: The New Testament teaches that in Christ there is 'neither Jew nor Greek' (Galatians 3:28) and that true lineage is spiritual adoption (Romans 8:15). D&C 64 reintroduces a tribal distinction, associating the 'blood of Ephraim' with faithfulness and the right to inherit the land of Zion. This creates a bio-spiritual hierarchy absent in the New Covenant.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of safety and justification. In D&C 64, safety from the 'burning' is contingent upon the financial act of tithing (v23), and justification before the law requires the human work of forgiving others (v13). Evangelical theology posits that safety from judgment is found only in Christ's propitiation (1 John 2:2) and that justification is by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:28). Furthermore, the text ties spiritual identity to the 'blood of Ephraim,' re-erecting the middle wall of partition that Christ broke down (Ephesians 2:14).

Shared Values:

Importance of forgiveness; Generosity/Tithing (as a practice, not soteriology); Avoiding debt; Church discipline for unrepentant sin

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation (safety from burning) is conditioned on a financial work (tithing).
- 2. [Critical] Sola Gratia – Grace is replaced by a 'day of sacrifice' to secure standing.
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper (Justice) – God defines the victim's lack of forgiveness as a 'greater sin' than the perpetrator's offense.
- 4. [Major] Universal Priesthood/Ecclesiology – Reintroduces lineage (Ephraim) as a basis for spiritual standing.

Semantic Warnings:

"Tithing"

In Text: A sacrifice required to avoid being burned at the Lord's coming.
Evangelical: A freewill offering or support for the Levitical priesthood (OT); cheerful giving (NT), never linked to escaping hellfire.
Example: *In D&C 64:23, tithing is fire insurance. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, giving is a joyful response to grace.*

"Zion"

In Text: A specific geographic location (Missouri/Kirtland) to be inherited.
Evangelical: The spiritual city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22).
Example: *The text speaks of being 'cut off out of the land of Zion' (v35) as a physical expulsion.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: In this context, salvation is framed as 'overcoming the world' (v2) and escaping the 'burning' at the Second Coming (v23).

How Attained: Through obedience to ordinances, specifically tithing, and maintaining a forgiving heart to satisfy the law.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is derived from compliance: 'he that is tithed shall not be burned.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by stating that a specific work (tithing) prevents judgment. Romans 5:9 states we are 'saved from wrath through Him [Christ],' not through our tithes.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Forgive all men (v10)
- 2. Pay tithing to avoid burning (v23)
- 3. Labor while it is called today (v25)
- 4. Do not get in debt to enemies (v27)
- 5. Bring unrepentant sinners before the church (v12)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's authority despite his admitted sins (v7)
2. Submit property/farms to church direction (v20-21)
3. Accept the church's judgment as the judgment of God (v37)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Tithing (framed here as a saving ordinance/sacrifice)
2. Confession of sins before the Lord (v7)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read verse 23, 'he that is tithed shall not be burned,' how do you reconcile that with salvation being a free gift of grace?
2. The text says if I struggle to forgive someone who hurt me, I have the 'greater sin' (v9). How does that impact someone who has been deeply abused?
3. If Joseph Smith's keys depend on him 'obeying mine ordinances' (v5), and the text admits 'he has sinned' (v7), how does a member know if he has crossed the line of disobedience?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Willing Mind – This phrase acknowledges that God wants internal transformation, not just external compliance. It bridges to the New Covenant promise where God writes His law on our hearts. [Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 8:12]
2. Overcoming the World – This desire for victory over sin is fulfilled not by our effort, but by faith in Christ who has already overcome the world. [John 16:33, 1 John 5:4-5]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial Legalism / Fear [Severe] – The explicit threat that non-tithe payers will be 'burned' creates a fear-based relationship with giving. It transforms generosity into a protection racket payment.
2. Emotional Guilt / Victim Blaming [Severe] – Labeling a struggling victim as having the 'greater sin' can cause immense psychological damage, enforcing silence and preventing genuine healing in favor of forced reconciliation.
3. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The requirement to be 'justified in the eyes of the law' (v13) keeps the believer on a treadmill of performance, never sure if they have done enough to satisfy the lawgiver.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith speaking as the Lord).

Verification Method: Obedience to the commands serves as the verification; the text implies that 'liars and hypocrites' will be proved by the church leaders (v39).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests prophecy against Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1). This text demands obedience to a leader who 'has sinned' (v7) but retains authority, creating a closed loop where the leader defines the truth.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 11, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The revelation was received during a period of high stress and apostasy (Ezra Booth). The specific instructions regarding farm sales reflect immediate economic needs of the church in 1831.