

SECTION 80

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

OVERVIEW

Given in March 1832, this short revelation addresses Stephen Burnett and Eden Smith. It serves as a missionary commission, commanding them to 'go ye into the world' and preach to 'every creature.' Notably, the text displays a high degree of flexibility regarding their destination, stating that whether they go north, south, east, or west, 'it mattereth not.' This suggests that the act of obedience in preaching takes precedence over the specific field of labor. The revelation commands them to declare what they 'know to be true,' grounding the message in their subjective testimony and belief. It concludes with a divine signature, asserting the voice is that of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, speaking through Joseph Smith.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Stephen Burnett (The Recipient), Eden Smith (The Companion)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONTINUOUS REVELATION VIA PROPHETIC CHANNEL

Assertion: God gives specific, logistical instructions to individuals through a living prophet.

"Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Stephen Burnett... (D&C 80:1)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the canon of Scripture is closed (Jude 1:3). While the Holy Spirit guides believers individually (Romans 8:14), this guidance is not considered binding 'revelation' equal to Scripture, nor is it mediated through a central prophet figure for personal logistical decisions. D&C 80 presents Joseph Smith as the necessary conduit for Burnett to know God's will, establishing a hierarchy where the prophet mediates the 'call.' This violates the Priesthood of All Believers, where every Christian has direct access to God's will through Scripture and prayer.

2. TESTIMONY-BASED EVANGELISM

Assertion: The content of preaching is defined by what the missionary has 'heard, and verily believe, and know to be true.'

"declare the things which ye have heard, and verily believe, and know to be true. (D&C 80:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Evangelical mandate is to 'preach the word' (2 Timothy 4:2)—an objective deposit of truth found in the Bible. While personal conviction is vital, the authority of the message rests on the text of Scripture, not the speaker's internal certainty. D&C 80:4 shifts the focus to the missionary's internal epistemology ('things which ye... know to be true'). This aligns with the Mormon emphasis on 'bearing testimony' (subjective experience) as the primary tool of conversion, rather than the exposition of biblical texts.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of authority and guidance. In this text, the 'Call' is a specific revelation mediated through a prophet, binding the conscience of the believer to a new, extra-biblical command. In Evangelicalism, the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is a standing order for all believers, and specific guidance is a matter of wisdom and Spirit-led conviction, not canonical revelation. Furthermore, the content of the message in D&C 80 is the missionary's 'knowledge' (testimony of the Restoration), whereas the Evangelical message is the 'faith once for all delivered' (Jude 3)—the objective work of Christ.

Shared Values:

Importance of evangelism/missions; Jesus Christ identified as Redeemer; Conviction in preaching

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new, binding revelation to the canon.

2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Interposes a human mediator (Smith) to deliver God's personal will to another man.
3. [Minor] Sola Fide (Implicit) – Shifts focus from the object of faith (Christ) to the subject's knowledge (testimony).

Semantic Warnings:

"Gospel"

In Text: In 1832 Mormonism, this referred to the 'restored' gospel, including the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's authority.

Evangelical: The good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: *When D&C 80:1 says 'preach the gospel,' it implies preaching the Restoration. When Paul says 'preach the gospel,' he means Christ crucified.*

"Call"

In Text: A specific assignment given by ecclesiastical authority (prophet).

Evangelical: The general invitation to salvation or the internal/external confirmation of gifting for ministry.

Example: *Burnett is 'called' by a revelation through Smith; a Baptist pastor is 'called' by the Holy Spirit and confirmed by a congregation.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to the acceptance of the 'gospel' being preached (Restoration).

How Attained: Through the ordinances and covenants preached by the missionaries (though not explicitly detailed in this short text).

Basis of Assurance: Personal knowledge/testimony (v4).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the ***activity*** of the missionary and the ***testimony*** of the believer, rather than the finished work of Christ as the sole ground of justification.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go into the world and preach the gospel (v1)
2. Take Eden Smith as a companion (v2)
3. Declare things heard, believed, and known to be true (v4)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the voice of Jesus Christ
2. Exercise agency in choosing a mission field while remaining obedient to the call to go

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, the Lord says 'it mattereth not' where they go. How do you interpret that balance between God's sovereignty and our free will?
2. Verse 4 says to declare what you 'know to be true.' How does a missionary distinguish between emotional certainty and objective truth?
3. Stephen Burnett, the recipient of this revelation, later left the church. How do you understand the promise 'ye cannot go amiss' in light of his history?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Divine Flexibility/Grace in Service – This reflects a shadow of the truth that God can use a willing heart anywhere. It points to the freedom we have in Christ to serve without fear of missing a 'micromanaged' will of God. [Romans 8:28 (God works all things for good)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Certainty [Moderate] – The command to preach what you 'know' places a burden on the believer to manufacture absolute internal certainty. If they have doubts, they feel they are failing the command to 'declare... what ye know.'
2. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – The believer is conditioned to wait for a 'Thus saith the Lord' from a leader to know their standing or duty, rather than trusting the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective internal certainty ('know to be true') validated by prophetic declaration.

Verification Method: The text implies that the validity of the message is rooted in the missionary's internal conviction ('verily believe').

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology grounds truth in the written Word of God (John 17:17, 2 Timothy 3:16), tested by the Berean principle (Acts 17:11), not merely by internal feelings or the dictates of a modern prophet.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 7, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The text is a specific occasional letter canonized as scripture. The phrase 'it mattereth not' has been scrutinized by critics as a way to avoid falsifiable prophecies regarding specific outcomes.