

SECTION 9

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 9 is a pivotal text in Mormon theology, delivered in April 1829 during the translation of the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery, serving as Joseph Smith's scribe, had desired the power to translate. After a failed attempt, Joseph Smith dictated this revelation to explain the failure. The text asserts that Oliver failed because he merely 'asked' without 'studying it out in his mind.' It establishes a subjective methodology for revelation that defines Latter-day Saint epistemology: truth is confirmed by a 'burning in the bosom' (positive emotional/spiritual confirmation) or denied by a 'stupor of thought' (confusion or forgetfulness). Consequently, Oliver is relegated to the role of scribe, and the authority to translate is consolidated solely in Joseph Smith for the time being. The text concludes with a soteriological promise that faithfulness in this specific work will result in being 'lifted up at the last day.'

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (The Prophet/Translator), Oliver Cowdery (The Scribe/Failed Translator), The Lord (LDS conception, speaking in first person)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SUBJECTIVE REVELATION (THE BURNING IN THE BOSOM)

Assertion: Spiritual truth is confirmed through a specific somatic and emotional experience ('burning in the bosom') following mental exertion, while falsehood is indicated by a 'stupor of thought.'

"But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. (D&C 9:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine represents a fundamental epistemological divergence. In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit illuminates the objective truth of the written Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-13), but the Word itself remains the test of truth (Acts 17:11). Feelings are viewed as unreliable indicators of truth due to the fallen nature of the human heart (Jeremiah 17:9). D&C 9:8-9, however, institutionalizes internal feeling as the final arbiter of truth. This 'testimony' experience becomes the foundation for belief in the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic call, effectively bypassing external evidence or biblical consistency in favor of private, emotional experience.

2. REDEFINITION OF TRANSLATION

Assertion: Translation is not merely linguistic conversion but a revelatory process requiring spiritual 'power' and internal confirmation.

"I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate... it is not expedient that you should translate at this present time. (D&C 9:2-3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Christian history, translation (e.g., Jerome, Tyndale) is a rigorous academic discipline involving the study of grammar, syntax, and historical context. D&C 9 redefines translation as a charismatic gift where the translator does not need to know the source language but receives the text through revelation ('study it out in your mind' refers to the concept, not the language). This creates a theological gap regarding the nature of scripture: Evangelicalism views Scripture as historically rooted and verifiable; Mormonism views it as a product of ongoing, fluid revelation through a seer.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the doctrine of revelation. Evangelicalism asserts that the heart is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9) and that truth is external to the self, found in the historic deposit of faith (Jude 1:3). D&C 9 teaches that truth is internal and intuitive, confirmed by somatic markers ('burning'). This shifts the locus of authority from the text of the Bible to the psychology of the believer. Furthermore, the text implies that spiritual power is earned through correct technique ('you took no thought save it was to

ask'), whereas biblical spiritual power is a result of grace and the sovereign will of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Shared Values:

The necessity of prayer; The need for patience in God's timing; The importance of faithfulness

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Elevates subjective experience ('burning in the bosom') to a level of authority that supersedes or replaces biblical testing.
2. [Major] Theology Proper (God's Nature) – God is depicted as withholding truth/power based on a technical failure of the human agent ('you took no thought save it was to ask'), suggesting a God who requires specific formulas for interaction.

Semantic Warnings:

"Translate"

In Text: To receive the meaning of a text through spiritual revelation and internal confirmation, without necessarily knowing the source language.

Evangelical: To render text from one language to another based on linguistic equivalence.

Example: *In D&C 9, Oliver is told to 'study it out in his mind' to translate unknown characters; in Evangelical scholarship, one studies the grammar and lexicon of the source language.*

"Heart/Bosom"

In Text: The organ of spiritual verification; the place where truth is felt.

Evangelical: The center of personality and will, often described as deceitful and in need of regeneration (Jeremiah 17:9, Ezekiel 36:26).

Example: *D&C 9:8 says the bosom will burn to confirm truth; Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being 'lifted up at the last day' (v14).

How Attained: Conditional upon 'standing fast in the work' and obedience to commands.

Basis of Assurance: Faithfulness to the specific calling (scribing) and adherence to Joseph's leadership.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text links final salvation ('lifted up') to the performance of a specific work ('stand fast in the work wherewith I have called you'). This contrasts with Ephesians 2:8-9, where salvation is a gift of grace, not a result of fulfilling a church calling.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Be patient (v3)
2. Write for Joseph Smith (v4)
3. Do not murmur (v6)
4. Study it out in your mind (v8)
5. Ask if it be right (v8)
6. Stand fast in the work (v14)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's superior spiritual status
2. Trust internal feelings as the voice of God
3. Accept failure as a result of personal lack of effort or fear

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 8, the text says truth is confirmed by a burning in the bosom. How do you distinguish between a spiritual burning and a strong emotional response to something you simply *want* to be true?
2. The Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9 that the heart is deceitful. How does D&C 9 protect a believer from being deceived by their own feelings?
3. If Oliver Cowdery failed because he didn't 'study it out,' how does that align with the historical accounts that Joseph translated by looking at a stone in a hat without using books or study materials?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire to participate in God's work – Just as Oliver wanted to be active in the work, we all desire purpose. However, our ability is insufficient. Christ is the true Word (John 1:1) who reveals the Father perfectly, where our efforts fail. [John 1:1-14]
2. God's patience with failure – Despite Oliver's failure, God did not condemn him. This points to the grace of God in Christ, where there is 'no condemnation' for those in Christ Jesus. [Romans 8:1]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Epistemological Anxiety [Severe] – The believer is placed in a 'double bind.' If they pray and feel good, the church is true. If they pray and feel nothing (stupor of thought), *they* are at fault for not 'studying it out' or having enough faith. The text never allows for the possibility that the object of the prayer (the Book of Mormon) is false. This creates immense anxiety and self-doubt.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The text implies that spiritual gifts and revelation are contingent on correct methodology ('you did not continue as you commenced'). This fosters a works-based approach to spirituality where one must 'unlock' God's voice through proper technique.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective internal experience (feelings/intuition) interpreted as divine revelation.

Verification Method: The 'Burning in the Bosom' (v8) vs. 'Stupor of Thought' (v9).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests subjective experience against the objective Word of God (1 John 4:1, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). D&C 9 makes the subjective experience the test of the Word.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Originally published as Chapter 8 in the Book of Commandments (1833). Some editing occurred between the 1833 and 1835 editions to clarify the nature of the Urim and Thummim/seer stones.