

SECTION 41

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 Edition | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

This text, known in modern editions as Doctrine and Covenants Section 16, is a short personal revelation delivered by Joseph Smith to Peter Whitmer Jr. in June 1829. The text opens with a Christological assertion of authority, claiming to speak with 'sharpness and power.' The revelation serves two primary functions: first, to validate Joseph Smith's prophetic mantle by revealing a secret thought or desire known only to Peter and God ('I will tell you that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone'); and second, to reorient Peter's life priority. The text declares that the activity of 'most worth' for Peter is to declare repentance and bring souls to Christ. This establishes a paradigm in early Mormonism where missionary service is elevated above all other temporal or spiritual pursuits, linking the believer's ultimate 'rest' in the Father's kingdom to their active labor in harvesting souls. It is textually nearly identical to the revelation given to John Whitmer (modern D&C 15), differing only in the name of the recipient.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Peter Whitmer Jr., Joseph Smith

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC ACCESS TO PRIVATE MIND

Assertion: The prophet can reveal the private thoughts and secret desires of an individual as proof of divine authority.

"I will tell you that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the mechanism for validating the revelation is the disclosure of Peter Whitmer Jr.'s private thoughts. This asserts that Joseph Smith, acting as the voice of Christ, has access to the 'heart and mind' of the believer. In Evangelical theology, God searches the heart (Jeremiah 17:10), but the New Testament does not establish a pattern where church leaders prove their authority by reading the minds of congregants. This creates a dynamic of high control and spiritual vulnerability, where the leader is seen as the mediator of the believer's own internal reality.

2. MISSIOLOGICAL MERIT

Assertion: The activity of highest spiritual value ('most worth') is the active recruitment of new converts.

"the thing which will be of the most worth unto you, will be to declare repentance unto this people"

Evangelical Comparison: The text defines the believer's highest value proposition functionally: 'declare repentance.' This shifts the focus from ontology (who the believer is in Christ) to teleology (what the believer produces for the movement). In Evangelicalism, works are a fruit of salvation, not the definition of a believer's worth. By stating that evangelism is the thing of *most* worth, the text implicitly devalues other aspects of the Christian life—worship, family, private devotion, and vocational stewardship—creating a hierarchy where missionary work is the only truly 'spiritual' labor.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the source of authority and the definition of spiritual worth. For the Evangelical, the Bible is the sufficient guide for faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16), and the believer's worth is secured by Christ's imputed righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). In this text, authority is vested in Joseph Smith's ability to channel Christ's voice, and the believer's 'worth' is tied to their utility in expanding the church. This creates a functional works-righteousness where 'rest' in the Father's kingdom is the reward for successful labor, rather than a gift of grace received through faith.

Shared Values:

Jesus Christ is Lord and Redeemer; Call to repentance; Importance of evangelism

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims to be a new, binding revelation from Jesus Christ, effectively opening the canon.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Implies that future 'rest' is contingent upon the work of bringing souls, introducing a merit-based element to final salvation.
3. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a mediator (Smith) between the believer (Whitmer) and God's specific will, rather than the believer discerning God's will through Scripture and the Spirit.

Semantic Warnings:

"Rest"

In Text: A future reward in the Father's kingdom achieved after laboring to bring souls.

Evangelical: A present reality for the believer who ceases from their own works to trust in Christ (Hebrews 4:3, Matthew 11:28).

Example: *In this text: 'bring souls... that you may rest with them.' In Evangelicalism: 'Come unto me... and I will give you rest.'*

"Words of Jesus Christ"

In Text: Dictations given through Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: The red-letter text of the Gospels and the entirety of the biblical canon inspired by His Spirit.

Example: *Mormons accept D&C 41 as the literal voice of Jesus; Evangelicals view it as the words of Joseph Smith.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Resting in the kingdom of the Father with those one has converted.

How Attained: Implied synergy: Faith in Christ combined with obedience to the command to 'declare repentance.'

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is linked to the fulfillment of the command to bring souls.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text does not mention faith alone; it focuses entirely on the 'work' of evangelism as the thing of most worth. This contrasts with Ephesians 2:8-9, where salvation is a gift, not of works.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Harken to the words of Jesus Christ
2. Declare repentance unto this people
3. Bring souls unto me

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the mediator of Christ's specific will for your life
2. Prioritize missionary work above all other life pursuits

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When this section says the thing of 'most worth' is to declare repentance, how does that balance with simply knowing and loving Jesus?
2. I noticed this section is almost identical to the one given to John Whitmer. Do you think God had the exact same message for both, or was this a standard calling for early disciples?
3. The text promises 'rest' after bringing souls. How does this compare to Jesus' promise in Matthew 11:28 to give rest to those who simply come to Him?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Worth – Every human heart asks, 'What is my life worth? What should I do?' The text answers with 'work.' The Gospel answers with 'You are purchased by Christ.' [1 Corinthians 6:20, 1 Peter 1:18-19]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The believer is told that the most valuable thing they can do is convert others. This places the burden of others' salvation—and the validity of their own life—on their ability to persuade.
2. Conditional Rest [Severe] – Rest is presented as a future reward for labor, rather than a present possession in Christ. This can lead to burnout and a refusal to rest until 'enough' souls are saved.
3. Dependency on Leadership [Moderate] – By validating the leader's ability to know private thoughts, the adherent learns to distrust their own conscience and rely on the leader for spiritual reality.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective confirmation through the revelation of private secrets.

Verification Method: The recipient verifies the text's truthfulness because it accurately describes a private desire they had previously kept secret.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11) and the internal witness of the Spirit regarding the Gospel (Romans 8:16), not on a prophet's ability to perform mentalism or reveal secrets as a primary truth test.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This section is a duplicate of the revelation to John Whitmer (D&C 15). In the 1835 edition, they are presented as distinct sections (40 and 41), but the wording is verbatim identical save for the names.