

SECTION 45 (MODERN D&C 23)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, cataloged as Section 45 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (now Section 23 in modern editions), comprises five distinct revelations dictated by Joseph Smith in April 1830. Occurring shortly after the formal organization of the Church of Christ (Latter-day Saint), these oracles address five key figures individually: Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, Samuel H. Smith, Joseph Smith Sr., and Joseph Knight Sr. The text functions as a divine performance review and assignment roster. The first four individuals are declared to be 'under no condemnation,' a phrase indicating their current acceptable standing before God, and are assigned duties of preaching, exhortation, and strengthening the church. Notably, Samuel Smith is restricted from preaching to the world at this time. The fifth figure, Joseph Knight Sr., receives a different address; he is not told he is free of condemnation but is commanded to 'take up his cross,' pray vocally, and explicitly 'unite with the true church,' indicating he had not yet fully committed to baptism or membership despite his material support of Smith. The text establishes Joseph Smith's role as the mediator of God's specific will for other individuals.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, Samuel H. Smith, Joseph Smith Sen., Joseph Knight Sen.

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC MEDIATION OF INDIVIDUAL STANDING

Assertion: The prophet has the authority to declare the spiritual status ('under no condemnation') of other individuals.

"Behold I speak unto you, Oliver... Behold thou art blessed, and art under no condemnation."

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, Joseph Smith acts as the mediator who reveals God's verdict on the spiritual state of others. He tells four men they are 'under no condemnation.' In Evangelical theology, justification is a forensic declaration by God received by faith (Romans 5:1), and assurance is an internal witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16) combined with the objective promises of Scripture (1 John 5:13). The idea that a church leader reveals an individual's justification status creates a dependency on the prophet for spiritual security, violating the concept of the Priesthood of All Believers where every Christian has direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 4:16).

2. ECCLESIASTICAL EXCLUSIVITY

Assertion: Salvation and duty are inextricably linked to uniting with the specific institutional organization established by Smith.

"And behold it is your duty to unite with the true church... that you may receive the reward of the laborer."

Evangelical Comparison: Joseph Knight is commanded to 'unite with the true church.' This implies that the organization Joseph Smith established is the sole repository of valid Christianity. In Evangelical theology, the Church is the 'Body of Christ' composed of all true believers regardless of denomination (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). While local church membership is biblical, this text implies that joining this specific group is a prerequisite for the 'reward of the laborer,' conflating institutional membership with spiritual validity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the mediation of the relationship between the individual and God. In this text, Joseph Smith functions as a necessary conduit for these men to know their spiritual status ('under no condemnation') and their specific life purpose. Evangelicalism holds to the 'Priesthood of All Believers' (1 Peter 2:5, 9), asserting that every believer has direct access to God through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). Furthermore, the text implies that 'reward' is contingent upon

uniting with Smith's specific ecclesiastical organization, introducing a form of institutional salvation that contradicts Sola Fide (Faith Alone).

Shared Values:

Warning against pride; Importance of prayer (secret and family); Duty to strengthen the church; Concept of 'taking up the cross'

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text presents new, binding revelation from God outside the Bible.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Reward and standing are linked to joining a specific organization and performing works (vocal prayer, exhortation).
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Spiritual direction and assurance are mediated through a single prophetic figure rather than the Holy Spirit directly.

Semantic Warnings:

"Under no condemnation"

In Text: A current status of approval granted by God through the prophet, seemingly contingent on recent behavior.

Evangelical: A permanent legal standing for those 'in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1) resulting from justification by faith.

Example: In Romans 8:1, 'no condemnation' is a result of being in Christ. In D&C 23 (Section 45), it is a status report delivered to specific men, notably withheld from Joseph Knight until he obeys.

"True Church"

In Text: The specific organization led by Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: The invisible body of all true believers in Jesus Christ across all time and denominations.

Example: Joseph Knight is told to 'unite with the true church,' implying his previous Christian faith was insufficient or invalid.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as a state of 'no condemnation' and receiving the 'reward of the laborer.'

How Attained: Through faith (implied), but explicitly requires uniting with the 'true church' and fulfilling specific callings.

Basis of Assurance: The word of the prophet declaring one's standing.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text adds an ecclesiastical requirement ('unite with the true church') to the receipt of the reward, contradicting the sufficiency of faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Beware of pride (Oliver)
2. Make known thy calling unto the church and the world (Oliver)
3. Strengthen the church continually (Hyrum, Samuel, Joseph Sr.)
4. Take up your cross (Joseph Knight)
5. Pray vocally before the world, in secret, and in family (Joseph Knight)
6. Unite with the true church (Joseph Knight)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the voice of God
2. Submit to specific role limitations (e.g., Samuel not preaching to the world yet)
3. Publicly identify with the new movement

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism/Membership (implied in 'unite with the true church')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When the text says you are 'under no condemnation,' do you feel that is based on your performance this week, or your standing in Christ?
2. Joseph Knight was told to pray vocally to receive his reward. How does that compare to Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:5-6?
3. If a prophet didn't tell you your standing before God, how would you know if you were saved?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for assurance ('Under no condemnation') – This reveals the universal human longing to know we are right with God. The Gospel offers this assurance permanently through Christ's finished work. [Romans 8:1, 1 John 5:13]
2. The call to 'take up the cross' – Acknowledges that following God requires sacrifice. The Gospel calls us to die to self, but to do so in response to grace, not to earn entry into a church. [Luke 9:23]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Dependency/Uncertainty [Moderate] – The believer must rely on the prophet to know their standing with God. If the prophet does not speak, assurance is ambiguous.
2. Performance/Public Display [Moderate] – Joseph Knight is commanded to 'pray vocally before the world.' This creates pressure to perform spirituality publicly to prove loyalty, risking the very pride warned against in verse 1.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Implicit trust in the revelator; the text assumes the recipients will recognize the voice as God's.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). Guidance is sought through the Bible and the Holy Spirit's illumination, not through new oracles delivered by a third-party mediator.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This section combines five separate revelations into one. In the 1835 edition, it was Section 45. In modern editions, it is Section 23. Headings were added later to clarify recipients.