

SECTION 46 (MODERN D&C 21)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally Section 46 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (now Section 21 in modern editions), marks the official organization of the Church on April 6, 1830. It serves as the constitutional document for Joseph Smith's authority. The text establishes a strict hierarchy where Smith is not merely a leader but a 'Seer, a Translator, a Prophet, an Apostle of Jesus Christ.' The core theological pivot occurs in verse 2, where the collective church is commanded to give heed to 'all his words and commandments' as he receives them. The text explicitly equates the voice of Joseph Smith with the voice of God ('as if from mine own mouth'). It promises spiritual protection against the 'gates of hell' contingent upon this obedience to the Prophet. While it affirms Christ's crucifixion, it functionally interposes Joseph Smith as the necessary mediator through whom the benefits of the covenant and the will of God are accessed.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (Prophet/Seer/Translator), Jesus Christ (The Lord God), God the Father, Oliver Cowdery (Apostle/Elder)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC INFALLIBILITY/SUPREMACY

Assertion: The words of the Prophet Joseph Smith are to be received by the Church exactly as if they were spoken by God Himself.

"For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the doctrine of Sola Scriptura (2 Timothy 3:16) establishes the Bible as the sole infallible rule of faith. Pastors and leaders are subject to Scripture and can err (Galatians 2:11-14). This text, however, elevates Joseph Smith's oral and written pronouncements to the level of divine speech ('as if from mine own mouth'). This effectively creates an open canon where the leader's current dictates supersede previous revelation, placing the believer's conscience in subjection to a man rather than solely to God's written Word.

2. MEDIATED SECURITY

Assertion: Spiritual safety and the inability of the 'gates of hell' to prevail are contingent upon obeying the Prophet.

"For by doing these things [heeding Joseph's words], the gates of hell shall not prevail against you"

Evangelical Comparison: Matthew 16:18 promises that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, a promise grounded in the identity of Christ. This text shifts the condition of that promise from faith in Christ to obedience to Joseph Smith. It implies that without strict adherence to the Prophet's commandments, the 'powers of darkness' might indeed prevail against the believer. This introduces a works-based element to spiritual security, specifically the 'work' of following the Prophet.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the locus of authority and mediation. Evangelicalism posits that the veil is torn and every believer has direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 4:16), with Scripture as the final arbiter of truth. This text reconstructs the veil in the person of Joseph Smith. By commanding believers to receive Smith's words 'as if from mine own mouth,' the text demands a level of submission to a human being that the Bible reserves for God alone. This creates a structural incompatibility: one cannot simultaneously hold to Sola Scriptura and the doctrine of the Living Prophet as defined here.

Shared Values:

Belief in Jesus Christ's crucifixion for sins.; Desire for the remission of sins.; Concept of a church community.; Ordination/Ministry.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Elevates human words to the status of divine speech.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a supreme mediator (Prophet) between the body of believers and God's will.
3. [Major] Sola Fide – Makes spiritual safety contingent on 'doing these things' (obeying the prophet).

Semantic Warnings:

"Apostle"

In Text: An office of priesthood authority held by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, indicating leadership over the church.

Evangelical: Someone who had seen the risen Lord and was commissioned by Him (Acts 1:21-22); generally limited to the Twelve and Paul in a foundational sense (Ephesians 2:20).

Example: *Joseph Smith is called 'an apostle' here to establish administrative supremacy, whereas Paul calls himself an apostle to establish his witness of the Resurrection.*

"The Church"

In Text: The specific organization established on April 6, 1830.

Evangelical: The universal body of all true believers in Christ across all time and denominations (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Example: *The text implies salvation/protection is found within 'this church,' whereas Evangelicals see the church as the result of salvation, not the dispenser of it.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Remission of sins and protection from the powers of darkness.

How Attained: Through the 'contrite heart' and belief in Jesus, but functionally maintained by obedience to the Prophet and participation in the specific church organization.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is derived from 'giving heed' to the Prophet's words.

Comparison to Sola Fide: While 'belief' and 'contrite heart' are mentioned, the text adds a third necessary component: submission to the Prophet. Galatians 1:8 warns against any gospel (even from an angel) that adds to the work of Christ.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Keep a record among the believers.
2. Call Joseph Smith a seer, translator, prophet, and apostle.
3. Give heed unto all his words and commandments.
4. Receive his word as if from God's own mouth.
5. Oliver Cowdery must ordain Joseph Smith.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Suspend critical judgment of leadership ('in all patience and faith').
2. Accept new revelations immediately as they are given.
3. View the organization of the church as a requirement for salvation.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination (Oliver ordaining Joseph).
2. Record keeping.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says to receive Joseph's words 'as if from [God's] own mouth.' How do you handle it when a prophet's words seem to contradict the Bible?
2. If the 'gates of hell' are kept back by heeding the Prophet, what happens to a person who loves Jesus but disagrees with Joseph Smith?
3. Why does the text say you need 'patience' to receive his words? Does that imply his words might be difficult or seem wrong at first?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The longing for a 'Sure Word' – We all want to hear God clearly. The Gospel answers this not with a new lawgiver, but with the Living Word (Jesus) and the Written Word (Bible) illuminated by the Holy Spirit. [2 Peter 1:19 ('We have also a more sure word of prophecy...')]
2. Weeping for Zion – This reflects a genuine sorrow for the brokenness of the world. Jesus also wept for Jerusalem. This shared desire for restoration is a bridge to discuss the true Kingdom of God. [Luke 19:41 (Jesus weeping over Jerusalem)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Cognitive Dissonance / Suppression of Conscience [Severe] – The command to receive words 'in all patience and faith' creates a burden where the believer must suppress their own conscience or biblical understanding if it conflicts with the leader. It frames critical thinking as a lack of 'patience' or 'faith.'
2. Fear of Spiritual Exposure [Moderate] – The text implies that without the Prophet, the 'powers of darkness' will not be dispersed. This creates a fear-based dependency on the leader for spiritual protection.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Authoritative Revelation through a single human channel (Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Adherents are told to believe 'in all patience and faith,' implying that internal resistance to the Prophet's words should be suppressed or overcome by trust.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology encourages testing spirits (1 John 4:1) and searching the Scriptures to verify teaching (Acts 17:11). This text demands reception of words 'as if from [God's] own mouth,' discouraging the Berean mindset.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 6, 1830 (Published in 1835 D&C).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated).

Textual Issues: This text was canonized to retroactively validate the leadership structure established on the day the church was organized.