

SECTION 56 (MODERN D&C 34)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, identified as Section 56 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 34 in modern editions), is a revelation dictated by Joseph Smith addressed to Orson Pratt in November 1830. Pratt, a recent convert who would become a significant theologian and apostle in the movement, is addressed directly by the voice of Jesus Christ through Smith. The text is heavily eschatological, reflecting the intense millenarian urgency of early Mormonism. It commands Pratt to 'lift up his voice' to declare repentance to a 'crooked and perverse generation.' The revelation utilizes strong biblical imagery regarding the signs of the times (sun darkened, moon to blood) to underscore the nearness of the Second Advent. Theologically, it establishes the mode of operation for the early Mormon priesthood: preaching is to be done 'by the power of the Holy Ghost,' and divine presence is promised conditionally upon the adherent's faithfulness. It serves as both a commission for Pratt's ministry and a reinforcement of Smith's role as the channel for Christ's contemporary voice.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Orson Pratt (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Revelator/Medium)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONTINUOUS REVELATION

Assertion: Jesus Christ speaks in the first person through a living prophet to give specific instructions to individuals.

"My son Orson, hearken and hear and behold what I the Lord God shall say unto you"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Canon of Scripture is closed (Hebrews 1:1-2, Revelation 22:18-19), meaning God no longer issues new normative scripture or direct first-person revelations that stand alongside the Bible. This text asserts that Joseph Smith can speak ***as*** God ('I the Lord God'), effectively reopening the Canon. This shifts the locus of authority from the written Word to the living prophet, a fundamental divergence from historic Protestantism.

2. CONDITIONAL DIVINE PRESENCE

Assertion: Christ's presence with the believer is contingent upon their faithfulness in fulfilling their calling.

"if you are faithful behold I am with you until I come"

Evangelical Comparison: The text introduces a conditional clause ('if you are faithful') regarding Christ's presence. In Evangelical soteriology, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and union with Christ are sealed at justification and are not contingent on the believer's performance or ministerial success (Ephesians 1:13-14, Hebrews 13:5). This text implies that unfaithfulness could result in the withdrawal of Christ's presence, introducing a works-based maintenance of spiritual standing.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the Christological titles used in the text (Redeemer, Light, Life) are biblically sound, the mechanism of delivery creates an insurmountable gap. By claiming to be the direct voice of Jesus Christ in 1830, the text bypasses the sufficiency of Scripture. Furthermore, the conditional covenant ('if you are faithful... I am with you') shifts the security of the believer from the finished work of Christ to the ongoing performance of the disciple. This creates a subtle but critical shift from a relationship based on covenant grace to one based on covenant faithfulness/works.

Shared Values:

Jesus is the Light and Life of the world; Jesus is the Redeemer; Necessity of repentance; Belief is required to become sons of God; Literal Second Coming of Christ

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text claims to be the voice of God, adding to the canon of Scripture.
2. [Major] Sola Fide / Assurance – Conditions Christ's presence on the believer's faithfulness ('if you are faithful').

Semantic Warnings:

"Gospel"

In Text: The specific message restored through Joseph Smith, including the Book of Mormon and new revelations.

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

Example: When the text says 'preach my gospel,' it implies preaching the specific tenets of Mormonism, not just the biblical atonement.

"Sons of God"

In Text: In 1830 Mormonism, this was closer to the biblical view, but it evolves into a literal potential for godhood (Exaltation).

Evangelical: Adopted children of God through faith in Christ (John 1:12, Galatians 4:5).

Example: The text uses John 1:12 language, but the trajectory of LDS theology later redefines this as literal offspring of heavenly parents.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Becoming 'sons of God' through belief, but maintained through faithfulness and obedience to the call.

How Attained: Belief (initial) + Faithfulness/Works (ongoing).

Basis of Assurance: Conditional upon personal faithfulness ('if you are faithful').

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text begins with 'blessed are you because you have believed,' echoing Sola Fide, but immediately pivots to a performance-based maintenance of that standing ('if you are faithful... I am with you'). Biblical assurance is based on Christ's faithfulness, not ours (2 Timothy 2:13).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Hearken and hear what the Lord says
2. Lift up your voice as with the sound of a trump
3. Cry repentance
4. Prophesy
5. Spare not (in preaching)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the voice of God
2. Believe in the imminent Second Coming as a motivation for urgency
3. Maintain personal faithfulness to ensure God's presence

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, the Lord says, 'if you are faithful behold I am with you.' How do you interpret that 'if'? Does it mean Christ leaves us if we struggle?
2. The text uses strong language from John 1 about becoming sons of God through belief. Do you feel that your standing as a son of God is secure, or does it fluctuate based on your performance?
3. When you read 'lift up your voice... long and loud,' do you feel a burden to perform, or a freedom to share good news?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Urgency of the Second Coming – Both traditions share a longing for Christ's return to set the world right. This shared hope can be a bridge to discuss *how* we are prepared for that day—by our works or by His righteousness. [Titus 2:13]
2. Becoming Sons of God – This is a direct quote of John 1:12. It serves as a perfect bridge to discuss the biblical definition of adoption—that it is a gift of grace received by faith, not a status earned by progression. [John 1:12]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Fear [Moderate] – The believer must constantly discern if a 'revelation' is truly from God or a man, creating epistemological anxiety. If the prophet speaks, one must obey or risk opposing God.
2. Performance/Legalism [Severe] – The conditional 'if you are faithful' hangs over the believer. The assurance of God's presence is tied to their output (preaching 'long and loud') rather than Christ's indwelling Spirit.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Internal spiritual confirmation ('blessed are you because you have believed') and obedience to the prophetic voice.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology tests all prophecy against the closed canon of Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the immediate voice of the revealer (Smith) speaking as God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: November 4, 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text appears as Section 56 in the 1835 edition but was renumbered to Section 34 in later editions (1876/1921/1981/2013).