

SECTION 68 (MODERN D&C 55)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, identified as Section 68 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 55 in modern editions), was dictated by Joseph Smith in June 1831. It addresses William W. Phelps, a printer who had recently arrived in Kirtland, Ohio. The text outlines a distinct soteriological process: Phelps is told that 'after' baptism he will receive a remission of sins, and subsequently, the Holy Spirit via the laying on of hands. This establishes a rigid sacramental order. Furthermore, Phelps is ordained to the office of an Elder with the specific authority to 'give the Holy Spirit' to others who are contrite. Beyond the spiritual ordinances, the revelation integrates the secular and sacred by assigning Phelps to assist Oliver Cowdery in printing and writing books for the instruction of children, emphasizing the importance of education within the nascent church. Finally, it commands a physical gathering, instructing Phelps to travel with Smith and Sidney Rigdon to the 'land of inheritance' (Missouri), intertwining spiritual salvation with geographic relocation.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Lord), William W. Phelps, Joseph Smith, jr., Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Coe

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. BAPTISMAL REGENERATION

Assertion: Remission of sins is contingent upon and follows the physical act of water baptism.

"after thou hast been baptized by water... you shall have a remission of your sins"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly structures salvation chronologically: first baptism, then remission. This constitutes Baptismal Regeneration, a view rejected by Evangelicalism which holds that justification is by faith alone (Romans 5:1) and that baptism is an outward testimony of a pre-existing inward reality. In the Evangelical view, the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) was saved without water, whereas this text implies water is a prerequisite for remission.

2. SACERDOTAL PNEUMATOLOGY (PRIESTHOOD CONTROL OF THE SPIRIT)

Assertion: Authorized priesthood holders possess the power to dispense the Holy Spirit to others through physical touch.

"on whomsoever you shall lay your hands... you shall have power to give the Holy Spirit."

Evangelical Comparison: The text claims Phelps will have 'power to give the Holy Spirit.' This suggests a magisterial or mechanical view of the Holy Spirit where human agents control the dispensing of the Third Person of the Trinity. Evangelical theology asserts that the Spirit 'blows where it wishes' (John 3:8) and indwells believers immediately upon hearing with faith (Galatians 3:2), independent of human permission or ritual mediation. This parallels the error of Simon Magus (Acts 8:18-20) who sought the power to lay hands for the Spirit.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of grace. In this text, grace is mediated: Joseph ordains Phelps, Phelps baptizes converts, and Phelps gives the Holy Spirit. This establishes a hierarchy of mediation that replaces the 'One Mediator' (1 Timothy 2:5) model of Evangelical Christianity. Furthermore, the text conflates justification (remission of sins) with the ritual of baptism, creating a works-righteousness framework where the ritual is the cause rather than the sign of salvation.

Shared Values:

Necessity of repentance; Importance of education/schooling; Belief in the Holy Spirit; Desire to glorify God ('eye single to my glory')

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation (remission of sins) is conditioned upon the work of baptism.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a special class of men who hold the power to dispense the Holy Spirit.
3. [Critical] Theology Proper (Pneumatology) – Treats the Holy Spirit as a substance or power wielded by men rather than a Sovereign God who distributes gifts as He wills.

Semantic Warnings:

"Remission of sins"

In Text: A cleansing effect produced by the ritual of baptism performed by authority.

Evangelical: Forgiveness granted immediately upon faith/repentance (Acts 10:43), with baptism following as a sign.

Example: *In this text, Phelps gets remission 'after' baptism. In Acts 10:44-48, Cornelius receives the Spirit (implying remission/acceptance) 'before' baptism.*

"Ordained"

In Text: Invested with priesthood power to administer saving ordinances and control the Holy Spirit.

Evangelical: Appointed or recognized for service (Acts 6:3), without the implication of controlling the Spirit's distribution.

Example: *Phelps is ordained to 'give' the Holy Spirit; Biblical elders pray for the sick or lead, but do not 'dispense' the Third Person of the Trinity.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Remission of sins and reception of the Holy Spirit leading to an inheritance in Zion.

How Attained: Through faith (implied), repentance, water baptism by authority, and the laying on of hands.

Basis of Assurance: Valid priesthood ordinances performed by authorized servants (Joseph Smith, Phelps).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by inserting baptism and laying on of hands as necessary causal steps for remission and the Spirit (Galatians 3:2-3).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Be baptized by water
2. Preach repentance and remission of sins
3. Assist Oliver Cowdery in printing
4. Select and write books for schools
5. Travel to the land of inheritance (Missouri) with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to ordination by Joseph Smith
2. Exercise discernment regarding the contrition of others before laying on hands
3. Relocate geographically to Zion

Ritual Requirements:

1. Water baptism
2. Laying on of hands for the Holy Spirit
3. Ordination to the office of Elder

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says you have the power to 'give the Holy Spirit.' How do you interpret that in light of the Spirit being God? Can a human control God?

2. If remission of sins comes 'after' baptism, what is the spiritual state of a person who has repented and believed but hasn't yet reached the water?
3. How does the command to write school books fit into your understanding of what constitutes 'scripture' or 'revelation'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Writing books for children – Just as there is a desire to instruct children in truth, God desires us to be 'taught of God' (John 6:45). The ultimate instruction is not in schoolbooks but in the Word made flesh. [2 Timothy 3:15]
2. Land of Inheritance – The human longing for a place of belonging and inheritance is fulfilled not in Missouri, but in the imperishable inheritance kept in heaven for believers. [1 Peter 1:4]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Ritual Anxiety [Moderate] – The believer must worry if their baptism was performed with the correct 'eye single to glory' and by the correct authority to ensure their sins are actually remitted.
2. Priesthood Responsibility/Guilt [Severe] – Phelps (and by extension, priesthood holders) carries the burden of 'giving' the Holy Spirit. If the recipient doesn't feel the Spirit, the priesthood holder may question their own power, worthiness, or the recipient's contrition.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Obedience to the prophetic command and subsequent experience of the promised blessings (remission/Spirit).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective standard of the written Word (2 Timothy 3:16) illuminated by the Spirit, whereas this text relies on the subjective voice of a modern prophet claiming to speak as the Lord.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was later re-numbered as Section 55 in the 1876 edition and subsequent modern editions. The 1835 edition canonized it as Section 68.