

SECTION 87

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

OVERVIEW

This text, known in modern Latter-day Saint editions as Section 75, was received in January 1832. It represents a pivotal moment in the organization of the early Mormon missionary force. Speaking in the voice of 'Alpha and Omega,' the text issues specific marching orders to several elders, pairing them off for evangelistic tours into the eastern, western, and southern countries. The revelation serves two primary functions: administrative assignment and theological motivation. Administratively, it revokes previous commissions (specifically William E. McLellin's) due to 'murmurings' and establishes new companionships. Theologically, it establishes a rigorous meritocracy: the receipt of 'honor, and glory, and immortality, and eternal life' is explicitly conditional upon faithful labor and not being 'idle.' Furthermore, it elevates the status of the missionaries to that of eschatological judges, granting them the authority to 'condemn' households that reject them, asserting that such rejection will be worse than the fate of heathens in the day of judgment. It also establishes a communal obligation for the church to support the families of these traveling elders.

KEY FIGURES

Alpha and Omega (Jesus Christ), William E. McLellin, Luke Johnson, Orson Hyde, Samuel H. Smith, Lyman Johnson, Orson Pratt

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL ETERNAL LIFE VIA LABOR

Assertion: Immortality and eternal life are rewards granted conditionally based on faithful labor and not being idle.

"if ye are faithful ye shall be laden with many sheaves, and crowned with honor, and glory, and immortality, and eternal life. (Verse 1)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, eternal life is the free gift of God (Romans 6:23) received through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation. This text, however, constructs an 'If/Then' covenant where the 'crown' of immortality and eternal life is the direct result of missionary exertion ('labor with your mights'). This shifts the basis of assurance from the finished work of Christ to the ongoing faithfulness of the worker, introducing a merit-based soteriology.

2. DELEGATED ESCHATOLOGICAL JUDGMENT

Assertion: Missionaries are granted the authority to judge and condemn households that reject their message.

"in the day of judgement you shall be judges of that house, and condemn them (Verse 3)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text elevates human missionaries to the role of divine judges. In the New Testament, while believers will participate in judgment in a derivative sense (1 Corinthians 6:2), the act of final condemnation is reserved for Christ. This text empowers the missionary to seal the fate of a household ('condemn them') based on their reception of the messenger, bypassing the direct mediation of Christ and placing the weight of eternal destiny on the interaction between the missionary and the prospect.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the locus of authority. In this text, 'eternal life' is the capstone of a life of 'labor with your mights,' creating a transactional relationship with God. Evangelicalism views eternal life as a present possession of the believer secured by Christ's finished work. Additionally, the text centralizes authority in the priesthood structure, empowering men to act as judges of eternal destiny, which usurps the unique role of Christ as the final Judge. The 'Idler shall not have place' clause introduces a performance-based retention of church standing that mirrors the soteriological performance requirement.

Shared Values:

Zeal for evangelism; Reliance on the Holy Spirit (Comforter) for guidance; Responsibility to provide for one's family

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation/Eternal Life is conditioned on 'laboring with might' and not being idle.
2. [Critical] Sola Gratia – The 'crown' is presented as a wage for the faithful laborer rather than a gift of grace.
3. [Major] Christology (Christ as Judge) – Delegates the power of final condemnation to human missionaries.

Semantic Warnings:

"Eternal Life"

In Text: The highest state of exaltation, earned through faithfulness, labor, and ordinances.

Evangelical: The gift of knowing the true God and Jesus Christ, received by faith (John 17:3, Romans 6:23).

Example: *In Verse 1, 'eternal life' is listed alongside 'honor and glory' as a reward for those who are 'laden with many sheaves.'*

"Judge"

In Text: A role delegated to missionaries to condemn those who reject their message.

Evangelical: The role of Christ (John 5:22) or the discernment of believers within the church (1 Cor 5:12), not the final condemnation of the lost.

Example: *Verse 3: 'ye shall be judges of that house, and condemn them.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: A combination of 'honor, glory, immortality, and eternal life' (Verse 1).

How Attained: Through faithful labor, proclaiming the gospel, and not being idle.

Basis of Assurance: Performance: 'if ye are faithful ye shall be laden with many sheaves.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by making the 'crown' contingent on the 'labor.' See Romans 4:4-5: 'Now to the one who works, his wage is not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go forth and proclaim the gospel
2. Do not tarry or be idle
3. Shake off the dust of your feet against rejecting houses
4. Support the families of missionaries
5. Obtain places for families

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept specific companionship assignments without complaint
2. Submit to the 'voice of the Spirit' as articulated by the prophet
3. Maintain constant productivity to retain standing in the church

Ritual Requirements:

1. Shaking off the dust of feet (a ritual act of judgment/testimony)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 1, it says 'if ye are faithful... ye shall be crowned with eternal life.' How do you interpret the word 'if' there? Does it create anxiety about whether you have done enough?
2. Verse 3 says missionaries will be judges and condemn houses that reject them. How does that sit with you compared to Jesus saying He came not to condemn the world but to save it?
3. The text mentions that the 'idler shall not have place in the church.' How does the church define 'idleness' today, and is your standing in the church dependent on your activity level?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Vineyard Laborer – Jesus uses the vineyard analogy in John 15, but He emphasizes that we can do nothing unless we abide in Him. The branch doesn't produce fruit to *become* part of the vine; it produces fruit *because* it is already in the vine. [John 15:5]
2. The Need for a Comforter – The text acknowledges the need for divine help. The true Comforter (Holy Spirit) points us to the finished work of Christ, not to our own labor as the basis for our crown. [John 16:13-14]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer is placed on a treadmill of 'laboring with might' to secure eternal life. The conditional 'if' hangs over their salvation.
2. Fear of Idleness/Rejection [Moderate] – The threat that 'the idler shall not have place in the church' creates a culture where rest can be interpreted as sin or unworthiness.
3. Burden of Judgment [Moderate] – Placing the responsibility of condemning households on the missionary creates an inflated sense of self-importance and a heavy spiritual burden to 'shake off dust' rather than love the lost.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Subjective Experience (The Comforter).

Verification Method: Adherents are told to call on the Lord for the Comforter to teach them, implying internal subjective confirmation.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology subjects subjective experience to the objective standard of written Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text places the immediate revelation through the prophet as the primary epistemological authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: January 25, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was later canonized as Section 75 in the 1876 edition of the D&C. The 1835 edition combines two revelations (A and B) into one section.