

SECTION 88 [MODERN D&C 83]

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

OVERVIEW

This text, identified as Section 88 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 83 in modern editions), addresses the practical administration of the Law of Consecration regarding the vulnerable. Given in April 1832, it establishes a legal and spiritual framework for social welfare within the early Latter-day Saint community. It asserts that women have a claim on their husbands for maintenance, and children on their parents. Crucially, it shifts the burden of support to the Church—specifically the 'Lord's storehouse'—in the event of the provider's death or inability to provide an inheritance. This support is contingent upon the faithfulness of the recipient; widows found to be 'transgressors' lose church fellowship, though they retain their legal property rights. The text underscores the early Mormon attempt to build a literal, economic kingdom (Zion) where spiritual standing and economic security were deeply intertwined.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord, Husbands/Fathers, Widows/Mothers, Children/Orphans, The Church (The Storehouse)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ECCLESIASTICAL ECONOMIC SAFETY NET

Assertion: The Church, via the Lord's storehouse, assumes the role of provider for widows and orphans when the family unit fails or is severed by death.

"after that, they have claim upon the church; or, in other words upon the Lord's storehouse"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism affirms the biblical mandate to care for widows and orphans (James 1:27, 1 Timothy 5), this text elevates the mechanism to a formal 'claim' upon a centralized 'storehouse.' In the New Testament, care was a function of koinonia (fellowship) and voluntary sharing (Acts 4:32-35). In this text, it is part of the Law of Consecration, a specific economic order intended to build a literal Zion. The 'claim' implies a right to resources based on church membership and faithfulness, contrasting with the evangelical view of benevolence as a fruit of the Spirit rather than a systemic entitlement or legal inheritance.

2. CONDITIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Assertion: Continued fellowship in the church for widows is contingent upon them not being found as 'transgressors' or 'unfaithful.'

"if they are not found transgressors they shall have fellowship in the church, and if they are not faithful, they shall not have fellowship"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly links 'fellowship' with moral standing ('not found transgressors'). While Evangelicals practice church discipline, the context here is economic maintenance. The implication is that spiritual standing determines social inclusion. In Evangelical theology, while sin disrupts fellowship, the believer's standing is secured by Christ's righteousness (Romans 8:1), not maintained by avoiding transgression to secure a 'claim' on the community.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom. This text reflects the early Mormon drive to build a literal, geopolitical Zion with its own economic laws (Consecration). Evangelicalism views the Church as a spiritual entity transcending civil structures, where giving is voluntary and 'inheritances' are spiritual (1 Peter 1:4) rather than landed property. Furthermore, the text creates a legalistic structure for benevolence ('claim on the church') that differs from the New Testament's grace-based generosity.

Shared Values:

Responsibility of family heads to provide (1 Timothy 5:8).; Community care for widows and orphans (James 1:27).; Rejection of idleness.

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Adds binding economic laws and 'storehouse' regulations as divine command, exceeding biblical instruction on church benevolence.
2. [Minor] Sola Fide – While not explicitly about eternal salvation, 'fellowship' (a proxy for standing) is conditioned on behavior ('not found transgressors') rather than faith.

Semantic Warnings:

"Inheritance"

In Text: Physical land or property stewardship within the community of Zion.

Evangelical: Often refers to spiritual inheritance in Christ (Ephesians 1:11) or the future New Earth, not current ecclesiastical land grants.

Example: *In this text, a child seeks an 'inheritance' from the storehouse (property/resources). In the NT, believers have an 'inheritance that can never perish' kept in heaven.*

"Consecration"

In Text: The economic practice of deeding property to the Bishop for redistribution.

Evangelical: The spiritual act of setting oneself apart for God's service (Romans 12:1).

Example: *Mormon consecration involves material assets and storehouses; Evangelical consecration is primarily a posture of the heart and life.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering in Zion and maintaining fellowship.

How Attained: Through faithfulness to the laws of the church (including economic laws).

Basis of Assurance: Standing in the church (fellowship) and possession of an inheritance.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on temporal administration, but the underlying principle is that 'faithfulness' (works/obedience) secures one's place in the community, contrasting with the unconditional acceptance of the believer in Christ (Ephesians 1:6).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Women must look to husbands for maintenance.
2. Children must look to parents for maintenance.
3. The Church must provide for widows, orphans, and the poor via the storehouse.
4. The storehouse must be kept by 'consecrations'.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Members must consecrate property to the church to fund the storehouse.
2. Widows must remain 'faithful' to maintain church fellowship.
3. Church leaders must judge the faithfulness of widows.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration (the act of deeding property/resources to the Bishop/Storehouse).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text mentions that widows have a 'claim' on the storehouse if they are faithful. How does the church determine who is faithful enough to receive help?
2. In the Bible, God is described as the 'Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows' (Psalm 68:5). How does the concept of the 'storehouse' reflect God's heart, and how might it differ from the grace we see in the New Testament?

3. What does it mean to you that fellowship is conditional on not being a 'transgressor'? How does that impact your sense of security in the community?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Claim – The text speaks of a legal right to support. In the Gospel, we have no legal claim on God based on our merit, but through Christ's adoption, we become heirs. [Galatians 4:7 - 'So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.']
2. The Storehouse – The human storehouse is limited and conditional. Christ is the true Bread of Life who provides eternally for the spiritually destitute. [Philippians 4:19 - 'And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Security Anxiety [Severe] – The widow or orphan, already vulnerable, must maintain 'faithfulness' to ensure material survival. This conflates spiritual struggle with the threat of destitution.
2. Institutional Dependence [Moderate] – The believer is tethered to the institution for 'inheritance' and 'maintenance,' making leaving the faith a matter of losing one's economic safety net.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Testimony of the Spirit regarding the prophet's authority.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the written Word (Psalm 119:105) and the Berean principle of testing teaching against Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the prophetic voice ('Thus saith the Lord') without biblical precedent for this specific economic structure.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 30, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: In the 1835 edition, this is Section 88. In modern editions, it is Section 83. The modern Section 88 is the 'Olive Leaf' revelation given in late 1832/early 1833.