

SECTION 99 (MODERN D&C 106)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, delivered by Joseph Smith in November 1834, addresses Warren A. Cowdery (brother of Oliver Cowdery). The text establishes ecclesiastical order by appointing Warren as a 'presiding high priest' over the church in Freedom, New York. It emphasizes the urgency of the 'everlasting gospel' in light of the imminent Second Coming, described using the biblical metaphor of a 'thief in the night.' Theologically, the text blends administrative instruction with soteriological claims. It asserts that there was 'joy in heaven' when Warren 'bowed to my scepter' (accepted the restored gospel) and 'separated himself from the crafts of men' (left previous religious affiliations). While acknowledging Warren's personal 'vanity,' the Lord promises mercy and grace, provided he humbles himself. Crucially, the promise of a 'crown' in the 'mansions of my Father' is explicitly conditional: 'if he continues to be a faithful witness.' This underscores the Mormon emphasis on enduring to the end in active service as a prerequisite for exaltation.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Warren A. Cowdery (Recipient), Joseph Smith (Revelator)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST

Assertion: Men can be ordained as 'presiding high priests' over local congregations.

"appointed and ordained a presiding high priest over my church in the land of Freedom"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the office of 'High Priest' is a local administrative and ecclesiastical role within the Melchizedek Priesthood given to human beings. Evangelical theology, grounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews (specifically chapters 7-10), asserts that the Levitical priesthood is obsolete and that Jesus Christ is the unique, final, and eternal High Priest. Consequently, the New Testament establishes offices of elders/overseers and deacons, but never re-establishes a human high priesthood, viewing such a claim as an infringement on Christ's unique mediatorial role.

2. CONDITIONAL ASSURANCE

Assertion: Final salvation (a crown) is contingent upon continuing faithfulness and witnessing.

"if he continues to be a faithful witness... I have prepared a crown for him"

Evangelical Comparison: The text offers a 'crown' in the 'mansions of my Father' only on the condition: 'if he continues to be a faithful witness.' This introduces a probation-based soteriology where final salvation (or exaltation) is unsecured until the end of life. Evangelicalism teaches that while good works are evidence of faith, the 'crown of righteousness' is secured by Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer at justification (Romans 8:30, 2 Timothy 4:8), not by the believer's success in maintaining a church office.

3. SECTARIANISM AS 'CRAFTS OF MEN'

Assertion: Leaving other Christian traditions to join Mormonism is described as separating from 'crafts of men.'

"separated himself from the crafts of men"

Evangelical Comparison: The text praises Warren for separating from the 'crafts of men.' In the historical context of early Mormonism, this phrase (and 'priestcraft') was often used to denigrate professional clergy of other denominations. This implies that previous Christian affiliation was illegitimate or corrupt. Evangelicalism views the universal church as the body of believers across various denominations, not a single institution one must 'bow' to for validity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the nature of the priesthood and the basis of assurance. By designating Warren Cowdery a 'presiding high priest,' the text bypasses the New Testament teaching that Christ fulfilled and ended the human high priesthood. Furthermore, the text presents a 'probationary' view of salvation where a 'crown' is contingent on 'continuing' in a church calling. This contradicts the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Fide, where the crown of life is a gift of grace guaranteed by the Holy Spirit's seal, not a reward for ecclesiastical tenure.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming; Necessity of humility; Call to evangelism/preaching; Warning the world of judgment

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Re-institutes a hierarchical priesthood office (High Priest) that mediates authority.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide / Assurance – Makes the 'crown' conditional on 'continuing' as a faithful witness rather than faith in Christ alone.
3. [Major] Christology – Diminishes Christ's unique role by applying His title (High Priest) to a human.
4. [Moderate] Ecclesiology – Defines the true church by specific priesthood lineage and rejects other expressions as 'crafts of men.'

Semantic Warnings:

"High Priest"

In Text: An office in the Melchizedek Priesthood held by men to preside over local congregations.

Evangelical: A title reserved exclusively for Jesus Christ in the New Covenant (Hebrews 4:14).

Example: *In this text, Warren is a high priest; in Hebrews, Jesus is the only High Priest.*

"Crafts of men"

In Text: Other religious denominations, paid clergy of other faiths, or secular entanglements.

Evangelical: N/A (Biblically, 'craft' usually refers to a trade, e.g., Acts 18:3).

Example: *The text implies leaving a Baptist or Methodist church is separating from 'crafts of men.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Receiving a 'crown' in the 'mansions of my Father' (Exaltation).

How Attained: Through bowing to the scepter (joining the church), separating from crafts of men, and continuing as a faithful witness.

Basis of Assurance: Conditional promise: 'I will give him grace... if he continues.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text adds works (ministry service, separation from other faiths) as necessary conditions for the crown, violating Romans 4:5 ('to him that worketh not, but believeth').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Preach the everlasting gospel
2. Warn the people in Freedom and adjoining countries
3. Devote whole time to this calling
4. Gird up loins
5. Humble himself

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the 'scepter' (Mormon authority)
2. Separate from previous religious affiliations ('crafts of men')
3. Maintain the office of high priest faithfully to secure the crown

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination as a presiding high priest

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says Warren receives a crown 'if he continues to be a faithful witness.' How do you define 'faithful enough' to know the crown is yours?
2. What do you think the text means by 'crafts of men,' and why was separating from them necessary for Warren to find mercy?
3. In Hebrews, Jesus is called our High Priest because He lives forever to intercede for us. How does the office of 'presiding high priest' in this section relate to Jesus's role?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Vanity of Heart – The text acknowledges that even a 'servant' has vanity. The Gospel answer is that God lifts us up not because we overcome vanity by ourselves, but because Christ humbled Himself for us. [Philippians 2:3-8 (Christ's humility vs. our vanity)]
2. Joy in Heaven – This echoes Luke 15. The bridge is clarifying **why** there is joy—not because we joined an organization ('bowed to a scepter'), but because a lost sheep was found by the Shepherd. [Luke 15:7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The believer is burdened with the need to 'devote his whole time' and 'continue' without fail to secure the crown. The 'if' clause hangs over their assurance.
2. Uncertainty [Severe] – Assurance is promised ('give him grace and assurance'), but it is immediately tethered to future behavior ('if he continues'). This creates a cycle where assurance is never fully possessed in the present.
3. Isolation [Moderate] – The command to separate from 'crafts of men' (often interpreted as other Christians) isolates the believer from the broader body of Christ, creating an 'us vs. them' mentality.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith speaking for God).

Verification Method: Implicit trust in the prophet's voice as the voice of God; confirmed by the promise of 'grace and assurance' given to the obedient.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test prophecy against the closed canon of Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience based on the authority of the speaker (Smith) rather than scriptural alignment.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: November 1834

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Published in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants as Section 99. In modern editions, it is Section 106. The text reflects the developing church hierarchy of the mid-1830s.