

SECTION 15

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 15 is a revelation given through Joseph Smith in June 1829 at Fayette, New York. It is addressed to John Whitmer, one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon and an early scribe for Joseph Smith. The text is notable for two reasons: first, its claim to divine authority rests on the 'seer' ability to reveal the private, unspoken desires of the recipient ('I will tell you that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone'). Second, it is textually identical to Doctrine and Covenants Section 16, with the exception of the name addressed (Peter Whitmer Jr. in Section 16). The core theological message defines the 'thing of most worth' for the believer not as faith in Christ's finished work, but as the active labor of declaring repentance and bringing souls into the fold, linking this labor directly to the reward of 'resting' in the Father's kingdom.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), John Whitmer (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Revelator)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. VALIDATION BY SECRET KNOWLEDGE

Assertion: Divine authority is confirmed by the prophet's ability to reveal the private thoughts or desires of the adherent.

"I will tell you that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone- For many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of the most worth unto you. (D&C 15:3-4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the epistemological foundation for believing the revelation is Joseph Smith's ability to articulate John Whitmer's internal thoughts. This suggests a model of authority based on 'seer-ship' or clairvoyance. In contrast, Evangelical Christianity grounds assurance in the objective, historical work of Christ and the public testimony of Scripture (1 John 5:13), rather than the prophet's ability to divine private secrets. While Jesus demonstrated omniscience in the Gospels (e.g., with Nathanael in John 1:47-48), Biblical authority is not primarily established by satisfying individual curiosity about personal worth, but by the fulfillment of public prophecy and the Resurrection.

2. MISSIOLOGICAL MERIT

Assertion: The activity of 'most worth' is the active recruitment of souls, which is linked to the reward of resting in the kingdom.

"the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. (D&C 15:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text places the burden of 'worth' on the function of the believer (preaching/converting). It implies a causal link: declare repentance -> bring souls -> rest in the kingdom. Evangelical theology asserts that 'rest' is given by Christ to the weary (Matthew 11:28) based on His finished work, not the believer's future success in evangelism. While evangelism is a command in Christianity (Matthew 28:19), it is not the basis of the believer's worth or their entry into eternal rest (Hebrews 4:10).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mediation of the relationship with God. In this text, John Whitmer requires Joseph Smith to tell him what God thinks of him and what he should do. This contradicts the Priesthood of the Believer (1 Peter 2:9), where the Holy Spirit guides believers directly through Scripture. Furthermore, the text introduces a 'merit' system where the 'most worth' is found in external performance (evangelism) rather than internal transformation or union with Christ by faith alone.

Shared Values:

Jesus is Lord and Redeemer; Call to repentance; Desire to serve God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Joseph Smith speaks in the first person as Jesus, adding to the canon of Scripture.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Spiritual 'worth' and future 'rest' are tied to the work of evangelism rather than faith in Christ alone.

Semantic Warnings:

"Repentance"

In Text: In early Mormonism, often associated with joining the restoration movement and preparing for the Kingdom.

Evangelical: A change of mind (metanoia) leading to a turning away from sin and toward God through faith in Christ.

Example: *In D&C 15, declaring repentance is the mechanism for bringing souls 'unto me' (into the movement/church).*

"Rest"

In Text: A future reward contingent on labor ('that you may rest').

Evangelical: A present reality for the believer based on Christ's work (Matthew 11:28, Hebrews 4).

Example: *The text says 'bring souls... that you may rest,' making rest a conditional future outcome of works.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Resting in the kingdom of the Father.

How Attained: Contextually linked to obedience and the work of declaring repentance ('that you may rest').

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is derived from the prophet's validation of personal desires and the performance of commanded duties.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text implies a 'faith plus works' model where the work of evangelism is necessary to secure the reward of rest, contradicting Ephesians 2:8-9.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Harken and listen to the words of Jesus Christ (v1)
2. Declare repentance unto this people (v6)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the mediator of Jesus' voice
2. Validate the revelation based on the accuracy of the private secret revealed

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 6, it says the thing of 'most worth' is to declare repentance. How does this compare to Paul's statement in Philippians 3:8 that the surpassing worth is knowing Christ Jesus?
2. The text says you must bring souls 'that you may rest.' Do you feel that your spiritual rest is contingent on how much work you do for the church?
3. Verse 3 mentions knowing things 'no man knoweth.' As a Christian, do you rely on secret knowledge for assurance, or the public, historical evidence of the Resurrection?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Worth – John Whitmer wanted to know what made his life valuable. We all seek worth. [Matthew 13:45-46 (Pearl of Great Price) - In the Gospel, Christ is the treasure we find, not the work we do.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Dependency on Leadership [Moderate] – The believer is conditioned to believe they cannot know God's will or their own standing without the mediation of the prophet/leader revealing it to them.

2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – By defining the 'thing of most worth' as external recruitment, the believer may feel their spiritual value fluctuates with their missionary success.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective confirmation via a prophet revealing personal secrets.

Verification Method: The adherent checks their own memory of their private desires against the prophet's statement.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical faith is verified by the public testimony of Scripture and the historical Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), not by private, esoteric knowledge revealed to a guru figure.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This section is a near-duplicate of Section 16. Critics argue this indicates Joseph Smith used a template for 'personal' revelations to the Whitmer brothers.