

# SECTION 16

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

## OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 16 is a revelation dictated by Joseph Smith in June 1829, addressed to Peter Whitmer Jr., who would later become one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. The text is presented as the direct voice of Jesus Christ speaking through Smith. In the revelation, the Lord acknowledges Peter's secret desire to know his highest duty. The response is that the thing of 'most worth' is to declare repentance and bring souls unto Christ. This text is notable for being textually identical to Section 15 (addressed to John Whitmer), with only the names changed. It represents an early developmental stage of Mormon missiology, emphasizing the gathering of souls as the primary objective of the believer's life, promising 'rest' in the Father's kingdom as the reward for this labor. It establishes Joseph Smith's role not just as a translator, but as a mediator capable of revealing the private thoughts and duties of his followers.

## KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Peter Whitmer Jr., Joseph Smith

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. INDIVIDUALIZED REVELATION VIA PROPHET

**Assertion:** God reveals specific, personal instructions and private knowledge to individuals through a central prophet.

"I will tell you that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone (D&C 16:3)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, the Priesthood of the Believer (1 Peter 2:5, 9) implies that every Christian has direct access to God through Christ. While God may use others to confirm guidance, the normative method for personal direction is the Holy Spirit illuminating Scripture (Psalm 119:105). D&C 16 establishes a dependency on the Prophet (Joseph Smith) to reveal even the 'secret thoughts' of the adherent to validate the message. This creates a vertical hierarchy of revelation that is foreign to the New Testament model of the body of Christ, where the canon is closed and sufficient.

### 2. THE PRIMACY OF EVANGELISM

**Assertion:** The single most valuable activity a believer can engage in is declaring repentance to bring souls to the church.

"the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people (D&C 16:6)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** Evangelicalism teaches that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism). While the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is a binding command, D&C 16 frames spiritual worth in terms of functional output ('the thing of most worth'). This subtle shift can lead to a works-oriented view of value, where a believer's worth is tied to their recruitment success, contrasting with the biblical view that our worth is established by adoption into God's family (Ephesians 1:5).

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** The fundamental theological gap lies in the mediation of the divine voice. In D&C 16, Jesus is depicted as speaking in the first person, but the words are coming through Joseph Smith to Peter Whitmer Jr. regarding a personal matter. In Evangelical Christianity, Christ is the one Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), and believers have direct access to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). By inserting a prophet who reveals personal secrets to validate his authority, the text shifts the locus of trust from the written Word of God to the living oracle, a foundational shift that characterizes the entirety of Mormonism.

**Shared Values:**

Importance of repentance; Desire to serve God; Belief in an afterlife/kingdom of God

### Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new, binding revelation from Jesus Christ through a modern prophet, effectively opening the canon.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Implies that 'rest' in the kingdom is a reward for the work of declaring repentance, rather than a gift of grace.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Interposes a prophet to reveal God's will for an individual's personal life.

### Semantic Warnings:

#### "Repentance"

**In Text:** In Mormon context, often evolves into a process of abandoning sin and performing works to qualify for forgiveness.

**Evangelical:** A change of mind (metanoia) and heart that turns from sin to God, resulting in fruit, but not the meritorious cause of salvation.

**Example:** *D&C 16:6 commands declaring repentance. In later LDS theology (D&C 58:43), this requires successful abandonment of the sin to be valid.*

#### "Rest"

**In Text:** A future state of reward in the Kingdom of the Father, contingent on labor.

**Evangelical:** A present spiritual reality for those in Christ (Matthew 11:28) and a future eternal hope, secured by grace.

**Example:** *The text says 'that you may rest with them,' implying rest is the result of the work.*

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Resting in the kingdom of the Father.

**How Attained:** Linked here to the action of declaring repentance and bringing souls.

**Basis of Assurance:** Obedience to the commandments and success in missionary labor.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text links future rest to current labor ('that you may rest...'). Evangelicalism teaches we work *from* a position of rest in Christ, not *for* it (Ephesians 2:8-10).

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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### Explicit Commands:

1. Hearken and listen to the words of Jesus Christ (v1)
2. Declare repentance unto this people (v6)
3. Bring souls unto me (v6)

### Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the voice of Jesus Christ
2. Prioritize missionary work above all other endeavors

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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### Discovery Questions:

1. I noticed that Section 16 is almost identical to Section 15. How do you interpret the fact that God gave the exact same 'personal' revelation to two different men?
2. The text says the thing of 'most worth' is declaring repentance. How does this compare to Jesus' statement that the greatest commandment is to love God?
3. In verse 3, Joseph Smith reveals a secret thought of Peter Whitmer. As a Christian, I believe the Holy Spirit speaks to my spirit directly (Romans 8:16). Why is a prophet needed to tell me what I am thinking or what God wants for my personal life?

### Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Worth – Peter Whitmer wanted to know what mattered most. We all want our lives to count. [Philippians 3:8 - Paul counts all things as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Dependency on Leadership [Moderate] – The believer is conditioned to look to the priesthood hierarchy for validation of their personal standing and duty, rather than developing a direct, confident walk with God through the Spirit.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – By defining the 'thing of most worth' as bringing souls, the text places the burden of others' salvation on the believer. If they aren't converting others, they are failing at the most important task.

**EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic revelation of private thoughts (Clairvoyance/Telepathy attributed to God through Smith).

**Verification Method:** The recipient (Peter Whitmer Jr.) is expected to believe the revelation is from God because it reveals a secret desire ('that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone').

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11) and the internal witness of the Spirit concerning the Word. It does not typically rely on a prophet revealing a believer's private thoughts as a 'magic trick' to prove authority.

**TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

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**Dating:** June 1829

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (dictation)

**Textual Issues:** This section is a word-for-word duplicate of Section 15, with only the recipient's name changed. This suggests a formulaic approach to 'personal' revelation in the early church period.