

SECTION 33

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

OVERVIEW

Given in October 1830, just six months after the formal organization of the Church of Christ (LDS), this revelation addresses two early converts, Ezra Thayre and Northrop Sweet. The text serves as a divine commission, utilizing urgent eschatological imagery ('eleventh hour,' 'coming of the Bridegroom') to motivate missionary labor. Central to the text's theological argument is the assertion of a 'Great Apostasy'—the claim that the existing Christian 'vineyard has become corrupted every whit' due to 'priestcrafts.' Consequently, the revelation positions the nascent Mormon movement not as a reformation, but as a total restoration 'called forth out of the wilderness.' It commands the missionaries to preach repentance, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Ghost, explicitly linking spiritual authority to the 'articles and covenants' of the new organization and the Book of Mormon. The text underscores the necessity of active labor ('open your mouths') and conditional faithfulness for salvation.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Ezra Thayre, Northrop Sweet, Nephi (Book of Mormon figure), Joseph Smith (The Revelator)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE GREAT APOSTASY

Assertion: The text claims the entire Christian world ('my vineyard') is 'corrupted every whit' and that no one does good due to 'priestcrafts.'

"And my vineyard has become corrupted every whit; and there is none which doeth good save it be a few; and they err in many instances because of priestcrafts" (D&C 33:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: This is a foundational divergence. Evangelicalism holds that while the visible church may err, the invisible church (the body of true believers) has persisted through history, sustained by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:18). D&C 33:4 asserts a total institutional and doctrinal collapse ('corrupted every whit'), necessitating a restoration of authority rather than a reformation of doctrine. This delegitimizes all other Christian denominations as products of 'priestcraft.'

2. RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

Assertion: The LDS Church is the specific entity established by God 'out of the wilderness' to replace the corrupted vineyard.

"this church have I established and called forth out of the wilderness" (D&C 33:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text employs 'wilderness' imagery (likely alluding to Revelation 12:6) to claim that the true church was hidden or lost and has now been re-established physically and institutionally through Joseph Smith. Evangelicals reject the notion that the church ceased to exist or needed to be 'called forth' again, viewing the church as the continuous gathering of the saints across all ages.

3. EXPANDED CANON

Assertion: The Book of Mormon is classified alongside 'holy scriptures' as a source of divine instruction.

"And the Book of Mormon and the holy scriptures are given of me for your instruction" (D&C 33:16)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the canon is closed, and the Bible is the sufficient rule of faith (2 Timothy 3:16, Jude 1:3). D&C 33:16 explicitly elevates the Book of Mormon to the status of 'holy scriptures' given by God, creating a dual-authority structure that often interprets the Bible through the lens of modern revelation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses familiar biblical language (harvest, bridegroom, repentance), the underlying theology is fundamentally restorationist. The primary gap is the 'Great Apostasy' doctrine (v4), which invalidates all other Christian baptisms and ministries. Furthermore, soteriology is modified: remission of sins is tied explicitly to water baptism (v11) and the reception of the Holy Ghost to the laying on of hands (v15) within the specific authority of the restored church. This replaces Sola Fide with a faith-plus-ordinance system mediated by a restored priesthood.

Shared Values:

Urgency of evangelism; Necessity of repentance; Belief in the Second Coming; Reality of the Holy Spirit

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood / Ecclesiology – Claims the universal church was 'corrupted every whit' and required a restoration of authority.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Links remission of sins directly to water baptism and confirmation ordinances.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Elevates the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's revelations to the status of 'holy scriptures.'

Semantic Warnings:

"My Gospel"

In Text: Faith, repentance, baptism by proper authority, laying on of hands, and enduring in the restored church (v11-12).

Evangelical: The good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins, received by faith alone (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: In v12, 'this is my gospel' immediately follows the requirement for baptism and the Holy Ghost, implying these rituals are constituent parts of the gospel message itself, rather than responses to it.

"Corrupted"

In Text: Total loss of priesthood authority and doctrinal truth ('every whit') among all Christian denominations.

Evangelical: Moral failing or error, but not the total cessation of the Church or the loss of saving truth.

Example: When the text says the vineyard is 'corrupted every whit' (v4), it means no valid church existed on earth prior to 1830.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Remission of sins leading to sanctification, contingent on ordinances and enduring faithfulness.

How Attained: Faith -> Repentance -> Baptism (Water) -> Baptism (Fire/Holy Ghost) -> Enduring to the end ('if ye continue').

Basis of Assurance: Conditional based on continuing in the church and keeping covenants (v13-14).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly commands baptism 'for a remission of your sins' (v11), contradicting the evangelical understanding that remission is received by faith in Christ's blood (Romans 3:25), with baptism as a subsequent sign.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Open your ears and hearken (v1)
2. Lift up voices as with a trump (v2)
3. Thrust in sickles and reap with all might (v7)
4. Open your mouths to declare the gospel (v8-10)
5. Repent and be baptized (v11)
6. Remember the church articles and covenants (v14)
7. Confirm believers by laying on of hands (v15)
8. Pray always (v17)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the premise that all previous Christianity is corrupt (v4)
2. Accept Joseph Smith as the channel for God's voice (context of revelation)
3. Study the Book of Mormon as scripture (v16)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Water Baptism for remission of sins (v11)
2. Confirmation/Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost (v15)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 4, God says the vineyard (Christianity) is 'corrupted every whit.' How do you interpret the faithfulness of Christians like William Tyndale or John Wesley who lived before 1830?
2. Verse 13 says 'if ye continue, the gates of hell shall not prevail.' How does this conditional promise compare to Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:18?
3. The text mentions 'Nephi of old' as a model for your service. How important is it to your faith that Nephi was a real historical person versus a symbolic character?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Eleventh Hour – Just as the text emphasizes urgency, the Bible teaches that 'now is the day of salvation' (2 Corinthians 6:2). We share a desire to not waste time. [Romans 13:11-12]
2. The Bridegroom – The image of Christ as the Bridegroom speaks to His desire for intimacy and love with His people, not just legalistic obedience. [Revelation 19:7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Isolation/Elitism [Moderate] – Believing that all other Christian expressions are 'corrupted every whit' creates a heavy burden of isolation. The adherent cannot truly learn from or fellowship with the broader body of Christ without viewing them as 'wrong' or 'apostate.'
2. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The command to 'thrust in your sickles with all your might, mind, and strength' (v7) coupled with the conditional 'if ye continue' (v13) creates a pressure cooker where salvation and standing are maintained by maximum exertion.
3. Uncertainty [Mild] – By opening the canon (v16), the adherent is subject to shifting doctrines and new requirements from modern leadership, lacking the stability of a fixed, sufficient Scripture.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Experiential Confirmation.

Verification Method: Adherents are promised that if they 'open their mouths,' they will be 'filled' (v8, v10), suggesting a pragmatic/experiential verification of the call.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (Acts 17:11) to test spirits and prophecies. This text relies on the subjective experience of the speaker and the authority of the modern prophet.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: October 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The revelation was originally addressed to Ezra Thayre and Northrop Sweet. Sweet later left the church, and early manuscript histories show the fluidity of these texts as they were prepared for the 1833 Book of Commandments and 1835 D&C.