

SECTION 66

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 66, dictated by Joseph Smith on October 29, 1831, is historically significant as a response to a specific challenge. William E. McLellin, a recent convert, had privately petitioned God with five specific questions, keeping them secret from Smith. This revelation claims to answer those questions, thereby serving as a 'sign' of Smith's prophetic ability to access hidden knowledge. The text follows a pattern of commendation and warning: McLellin is blessed for receiving the 'everlasting covenant' (the restored gospel) but is explicitly warned against adultery and commanded to repent of lingering sins. He is commissioned to travel east with Samuel H. Smith to preach, heal the sick, and gather people to Zion. Theologically, the text links the receipt of eternal life directly to the 'magnifying' of one's ecclesiastical office and enduring in obedience to the end, reinforcing the Latter-day Saint concept of conditional exaltation.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), William E. McLellin (Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Samuel H. Smith (Mission Companion)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL JUSTIFICATION

Assertion: The text asserts that McLellin is blessed 'inasmuch' (to the extent that) he has turned from iniquity, and is 'clean, but not all.'

"Blessed are you, inasmuch as you have turned away from your iniquities... you are clean, but not all; repent, therefore (D&C 66:1, 3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the believer's standing before God is fluid and quantitative ('inasmuch'). The phrase 'clean, but not all' suggests a partial justification dependent on the completion of personal repentance. In contrast, Evangelical theology posits that while sanctification (growth) is progressive, justification (legal standing) is absolute and immediate upon faith (Romans 5:1, 8:1). The text implies that McLellin's acceptance is contingent on his successful navigation of specific temptations, whereas the Bible presents acceptance as being 'in Christ' despite ongoing struggles with the flesh.

2. RESTORATION AS THE GOSPEL FULNESS

Assertion: The 'fulness of my gospel' is identified with the specific covenant revealed through Joseph Smith in the 'last days.'

"receiving mine everlasting covenant, even the fulness of my gospel, sent forth... in the last days (D&C 66:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text redefines 'Gospel' from the 'Good News' of Christ's finished work to a system of covenants and priesthood authority restored in the 1830s. By equating the 'everlasting covenant' with the 'fulness of the gospel' sent in the 'last days,' the text implies that the historic Christian church lacked the fulness of the gospel for 1800 years. This contradicts the Evangelical view that the faith was 'once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 1:3) and that the New Covenant in Christ's blood is sufficient without additional modern covenants.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the moral commands (don't commit adultery) align with Christian ethics, the soteriological framework is fundamentally different. In D&C 66, the 'crown of eternal life' is the result of a conditional 'if-then' proposition: 'Continue in these things... and you shall have a crown' (v12). This is a covenant of works. In Evangelical theology, the crown is a reward for service, but eternal life itself is a free gift (Romans 6:23) received by faith, not achieved by 'magnifying an office.' Furthermore, the text elevates Joseph Smith to a mediator who dispenses God's personal will and forgiveness, a role Evangelicals reserve for the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

Shared Values:

Prohibition of adultery; Call to evangelism/missions; Practice of praying for the sick; Need for repentance

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation/Eternal Life is conditioned on 'continuing in these things' and 'magnifying' an office.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Blessings are predicated on the extent of personal reformation ('inasmuch as you have turned away').
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new, binding revelation through a modern prophet that supplements the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Fulness of the Gospel"

In Text: The restored Latter-day Saint doctrines, priesthood authority, and covenants.

Evangelical: The message of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Cor 15:1-4).

Example: When the text says McLellin received the 'fulness of the gospel,' it means he accepted Mormonism, not just that he trusted Jesus for salvation.

"Clean"

In Text: A state of partial worthiness achieved through turning from specific iniquities.

Evangelical: A forensic declaration of righteousness through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7).

Example: The text says 'clean, but not all,' implying a partial state. Evangelicals view justification as binary: one is either in Adam (condemned) or in Christ (clean).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Eternal life is a 'crown' given at the end of a life of faithful service and office-magnifying.

How Attained: Through receiving the 'everlasting covenant' (Mormonism), repenting of sins, and enduring to the end in missionary service.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is low and conditional; it depends on 'continuing' and not being 'cumbered.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by making the 'crown of eternal life' the payment for a life of labor ('magnify thine office') rather than the inheritance of a son adopted by grace (Galatians 4:4-7).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Repent of things not pleasing to God
2. Proclaim the gospel from land to land
3. Go to the eastern lands
4. Bear testimony in synagogues
5. Take Samuel H. Smith as a companion
6. Lay hands upon the sick
7. Commit not adultery
8. Seek not to be cumbered

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's ability to reveal private sins
2. Submit to the specific travel logistics dictated by the prophet
3. Prioritize the mission over property concerns

Ritual Requirements:

1. Laying on of hands for healing

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, the Lord tells McLellin he is 'clean, but not all.' How do you know when you are finally 'clean enough' to be assured of your salvation?
2. Verse 12 promises a crown of eternal life **if** you continue to the end. How does this compare to the Bible's promise that we **have** eternal life the moment we believe (John 5:24)?
3. The text focuses heavily on McLellin's specific sins and office. Do you feel that God's acceptance of you is based on how well you fulfill your church callings?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The God Who Knows Secrets – Just as McLellin wanted to be known by God, the Bible teaches that God knows our inmost being (Psalm 139). However, God proves His love not just by knowing our secrets, but by dying for us despite them. [Romans 5:8]
2. The Struggle with 'Besetting Sins' – We all have specific temptations that 'trouble' us. The Law points them out (like D&C 66), but only Grace provides the power to overcome and the assurance of forgiveness when we fail. [Romans 7:24-25]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer is placed on a treadmill of 'magnifying' their office. Salvation is not a settled reality but a future prize that can be lost if one does not 'continue' perfectly.
2. Shame/Exposure [Moderate] – By canonizing McLellin's struggle with adultery, the text implies a God who publicly exposes private struggles. This creates a culture of fear regarding confession and vulnerability.
3. Uncertainty [Severe] – The phrase 'clean, but not all' leaves the believer in a state of spiritual limbo – never fully condemned, but never fully justified.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Clairvoyance).

Verification Method: The recipient (McLellin) verifies the text's truthfulness because it answers secret questions he had not revealed to Joseph Smith.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, historical verification of the Resurrection and the internal consistency of Scripture (Acts 17:11), rather than the prophet's ability to divine private thoughts or secrets.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: October 29, 1831

Authorship: Dictated by Joseph Smith; Scribe likely William E. McLellin or John Whitmer.

Textual Issues: Early manuscripts show minor variations common to the compilation of the Book of Commandments vs. Doctrine and Covenants. The core content regarding the '5 questions' remains consistent in LDS history.