

SECTION 70

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

OVERVIEW

Given in November 1831, Doctrine and Covenants Section 70 addresses the practical and spiritual logistics of publishing Joseph Smith's revelations (originally the 'Book of Commandments'). The text establishes a 'Literary Firm' consisting of Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, and W.W. Phelps. These men are appointed as 'stewards' over the revelations, meaning they hold the responsibility for their publication and distribution. Crucially, the text authorizes these leaders to derive their livelihood ('food and for raiment') from the proceeds of these sales, validating a paid clergy/leadership structure for those administering spiritual things. The revelation links economic communalism with spiritual vitality, warning that if the Saints are not equal in temporal things, the 'manifestations of the Spirit' will be withheld. It concludes with a conditional blessing based on their faithfulness and avoidance of sin, framing their security in terms of both material provision and divine favor.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Jun., Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, William W. Phelps

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. STEWARDSHIP OF REVELATION

Assertion: Specific individuals are appointed by God to manage, own, and profit from the distribution of scriptural texts.

"I, the Lord, have appointed them... to be stewards over the revelations... to manage them and the concerns thereof, yea, the benefits thereof. (D&C 70:3-5)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the 'revelations' are treated as a commodity with 'benefits' (profits) to be managed by a specific hierarchy. While Evangelical publishers exist, the underlying theology here grants these men spiritual authority **over*** the text's distribution and management. In contrast, Evangelical theology views the Canon as closed and public property of the Church Universal, not subject to the 'stewardship' of a small group of modern prophets who can edit or manage it for 'benefits.'

2. CONDITIONAL SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATION

Assertion: The presence and power of the Holy Spirit are contingent upon the community's adherence to economic equality.

"Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal... otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld. (D&C 70:14)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine ties pneumatology (the doctrine of the Spirit) directly to sociology and economics. The text threatens the withdrawal of the Spirit's 'abundance' if the Saints fail to practice temporal equality (The Law of Consecration). In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit is the 'seal' of salvation (Ephesians 1:13) and a gift of grace, not a reward for achieving a specific socio-economic order. While generosity is a fruit of the Spirit, the Spirit's presence is not held hostage by financial distribution models.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the open canon and the conditional nature of grace. By establishing a stewardship over 'revelations' that are to be published as binding law, the text rejects the sufficiency of the Bible. Furthermore, the warning in verse 14 introduces a 'prosperity gospel' variant where spiritual manifestations are contingent upon the community's successful implementation of economic equality. This contradicts the Evangelical understanding of the Spirit as a guarantee of inheritance given freely to believers upon regeneration (Ephesians 1:13-14), independent of their social structure's perfection.

Shared Values:

Accountability to God; Ministers are worthy of financial support; Care for the poor (storehouse concept)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text canonizes modern revelations and places them under human management, denying the closed nature of the biblical canon.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Spiritual blessings (manifestations) are earned through works (temporal equality) and 'not sinning'.

Semantic Warnings:

"Stewardship"

In Text: A specific ecclesiastical assignment with accountability to God, often involving management of church assets or revelation.

Evangelical: General responsibility of all believers to manage God's gifts; rarely implies a hierarchical ownership of revelation.

Example: *In D&C 70, stewardship is a formal office for six men to manage scripture sales; in 1 Peter 4:10, stewardship is every believer using their gifts to serve.*

"Mysteries"

In Text: Specific, often advanced or secretive doctrines revealed through the priesthood keys (from intro notes).

Evangelical: Truths once hidden but now fully revealed to all saints through Christ (Colossians 1:26).

Example: *The intro claims keys to 'mysteries' are entrusted to man; the New Testament claims the mystery of the Gospel is now open to all.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as entering into the 'joy' of the Lord (v. 18) and receiving 'manifestations of the Spirit' (v. 14).

How Attained: Through faithfulness in stewardship, not sinning, and adherence to the law of temporal equality.

Basis of Assurance: Performance-based: 'inasmuch as they have not sinned' (v. 17).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text offers no assurance based on faith alone. Acceptance is explicitly tied to the successful execution of stewardship and moral perfection ('not sinned').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Hearken to the word of the Lord
2. Manage the revelations and commandments
3. Give excess proceeds to the Lord's storehouse
4. Be equal in temporal things

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the financial support of church leaders as divinely mandated
2. Submit to the stewardship of the six named men regarding doctrine

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of property/funds (implied by 'storehouse' and 'equal in temporal things')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 14, it says the Spirit is withheld if the Saints aren't equal in temporal things. How does that impact your assurance of God's presence when you struggle financially or see inequality in the church?
2. Verse 17 says the leaders have done well 'inasmuch as they have not sinned.' How does this compare to the biblical idea that we are saved by grace specifically ***because*** we have sinned and cannot do well on our own?

3. What does it mean to you that the 'revelations' were considered a stewardship to be managed for 'benefits' or profit?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Stewardship – We are all stewards of the grace given to us. However, the greatest stewardship is the Gospel message itself, which we are to give away freely, not manage for profit. [1 Corinthians 4:1-2]
2. Accountability at Judgment – We all face judgment. The difference is that in Christ, our account is settled by His blood, not our management skills. [Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The believer is burdened with the knowledge that spiritual manifestations are withheld if the community fails in temporal equality. This makes the individual responsible for the collective economic state of the church.
2. Uncertainty of Standing [Severe] – The phrase 'inasmuch as they have not sinned' (v. 17) hangs over the believer. It implies that God's mercy and blessing are valid only as long as the believer maintains a sinless state in their stewardship, negating the comfort of unconditional grace.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the commands yields 'manifestations of the Spirit' (v. 13-14).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) rather than subjective spiritual manifestations conditioned on obedience to new commands.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: November 12, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This revelation was originally prepared for the 'Book of Commandments.' When the printing press was destroyed, it was later included in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. The concept of the 'Literary Firm' was later dissolved and replaced by other administrative bodies.