

SECTION 72

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

OVERVIEW

Received on December 4, 1831, in Kirtland, Ohio, Doctrine and Covenants Section 72 addresses the administrative and spiritual organization of the early Latter-day Saint movement. As the church expanded between Ohio and 'Zion' (Independence, Missouri), Joseph Smith dictated these instructions to manage the migration and stewardship of members. The text is pivotal for establishing the office of the Bishop as a financial and spiritual judge. It explicitly calls Newel K. Whitney to replace Edward Partridge (who had moved to Missouri) as the bishop in Kirtland. The revelation intertwines temporal duties—managing the 'Lord's storehouse' and funds—with eternal consequences, asserting that faithfulness in temporal stewardship determines worthiness for eternal inheritance. It introduces a bureaucratic requirement for 'certificates' of worthiness; members traveling to Zion were required to carry written proof of their standing from their local bishop to be received in the new gathering place. This text solidifies the hierarchical structure where spiritual acceptance is mediated through priesthood leadership and tangible records.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Jesus Christ), Joseph Smith, Newel K. Whitney, The Bishop in Zion (Edward Partridge, implied)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL INHERITANCE VIA STEWARDSHIP

Assertion: Eternal inheritance is contingent upon faithful performance of temporal stewardship duties.

"For he who is faithful and wise in time is accounted worthy to inherit the mansions prepared for him of my Father. (D&C 72:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the 'mansions' of the Father are a reward for being 'faithful and wise in time.' This establishes a meritocratic soteriology where temporal obedience and administrative competence are prerequisites for eternal reward. In contrast, Evangelical theology asserts that the inheritance is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit as a deposit (Ephesians 1:13-14) based on the finished work of Christ, not the believer's management of temporal resources. While the Bible encourages stewardship, it is a response to grace, not the cause of the inheritance (Galatians 4:7).

2. MEDIATED WORTHINESS (THE CERTIFICATE)

Assertion: Spiritual acceptability before God and the community is mediated through a physical certificate signed by a priesthood leader.

"A certificate from the judge or bishop... rendereth every man acceptable, and answereth all things, for an inheritance... (D&C 72:17)"

Evangelical Comparison: D&C 72:17 grants the bishop the power to render a man 'acceptable' through a written document. This creates a system where spiritual standing is bureaucratically administered. In Evangelical Christianity, the believer is made 'accepted in the Beloved' (Ephesians 1:6) through the imputation of Christ's righteousness. No human priest or judge has the authority to issue a certificate that 'answereth all things' regarding a believer's inheritance; that authority belongs to Christ alone as the Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 72 bridges the gap between temporal administration and eternal salvation in a way that is foreign to the New Testament. By stating that faithfulness in 'time' (temporal management) makes one worthy of 'mansions' (eternal reward), it introduces a works-righteousness paradigm. Furthermore, the requirement of a bishop's certificate to be 'acceptable' creates a priestly mediation system that the Epistle to the Hebrews argues was fulfilled and rendered obsolete by Christ. The text elevates organizational compliance to the level of soteriological necessity.

Shared Values:

Care for the poor and needy; Financial integrity; Accountability in leadership

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Inheritance of heavenly mansions is conditioned on being a 'faithful and wise' steward in temporal matters (v4).
2. [Critical] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Acceptance is earned through labor and certification, not given freely by grace.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where a bishop mediates acceptance and inheritance through certificates.

Semantic Warnings:

"Stewardship"

In Text: Managing church funds and personal property under the direction of a bishop, with eternal inheritance at stake.

Evangelical: Responsible management of God's gifts, but not the basis for justification or eternal sonship.

Example: *In D&C 72:4, stewardship determines if one inherits the mansions. In Luke 16, stewardship is a test of character, but salvation is by grace.*

"Bishop"

In Text: A specific priesthood office with authority to judge worthiness, manage storehouses, and issue certificates for salvation/Zion.

Evangelical: An overseer/elder (episkopos) charged with shepherding and teaching, not a mediator of salvation or financial judge of inheritance.

Example: *D&C 72:17 gives the bishop power to render a man acceptable. Titus 1:7-9 describes a bishop as a steward of God's word, not a gatekeeper of inheritance.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Inheriting 'mansions prepared' by the Father (v4) and having an 'inheritance' in Zion (v17).

How Attained: Through faithfulness in stewardship, rendering accounts, and obtaining a certificate of worthiness from the bishop.

Basis of Assurance: The physical certificate from the bishop (v17) and the approval of the church.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide. D&C 72:17 states a certificate 'rendereth every man acceptable.' Romans 3:24 states we are 'justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Newel K. Whitney must be ordained as bishop (v8)
2. Elders must render an account of stewardship to the bishop (v5)
3. Members going to Zion must carry a certificate (v25)
4. The bishop must keep the Lord's storehouse (v10)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Total financial transparency with church leadership
2. Submission to the bishop's judgment regarding personal worthiness
3. Acceptance of the hierarchical chain of command between Kirtland and Zion

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination of the bishop
2. Consecration of funds/property to the bishop

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 17, it says a certificate from the bishop renders a man 'acceptable.' How does that compare to how Paul says we are made acceptable in Ephesians 1:6?
2. If you lost your certificate or the bishop made a mistake, would your standing before God change?
3. Verse 4 says we inherit mansions by being faithful in 'time.' Do you feel the pressure that your eternal home depends on your temporal performance?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Certificate of Worthiness – Just as the Mormon pioneers needed a certificate to enter Zion, we need a 'pass' to enter Heaven. However, we cannot write it ourselves, nor can a bishop. [Colossians 2:14 (Christ canceled the record of debt); Revelation 21:27 (Lamb's Book of Life).]
2. Rendering an Account – We all have a debt we cannot pay. In D&C 72:14, the laborer pays the debt. In the Gospel, Christ pays the debt. [Romans 14:12 (Give account to God); Matthew 18:23-27 (The King forgiving the debt).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The believer is burdened with the knowledge that their eternal 'mansion' is contingent upon their temporal performance ('faithful in time'). This creates a constant anxiety of 'have I done enough?'
2. Fear of Man / Institutional Control [Moderate] – By placing the power to 'render acceptable' (v17) in the hands of a bishop, the text creates a dynamic where the believer must please a human leader to feel secure in their salvation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith speaking as the Lord).

Verification Method: Obedience to the 'voice of the conference' (v7) and acceptance of the revelation as the 'will of the Lord' (v8).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the testing of spirits against the closed canon of Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the authority of the speaker (Smith) and the office (High Priests/Bishop).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 4, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: This section is a composite of three separate revelations received on the same day, combined into one section for the 1835 edition of the D&C.