

SECTION 75

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

OVERVIEW

Given in January 1832 at Amherst, Ohio, Doctrine and Covenants Section 75 is a composite of two revelations delivered on the same day Joseph Smith was sustained as President of the High Priesthood. The text functions primarily as a missiological directive, assigning specific companionship pairings (such as William E. McLellin with Luke Johnson, and Orson Hyde with Samuel H. Smith) to various geographic regions to 'prune the vineyard.' Theologically, the text is significant for its explicit linkage of missionary exertion to soteriological outcomes; verse 5 promises 'honor, and glory, and immortality, and eternal life' specifically as a result of being 'faithful' in this labor. Furthermore, it elevates the authority of the Mormon priesthood holder to a judicial capacity, instructing them to 'shake off the dust' against rejecting households, asserting that these elders will stand as judges over those specific souls at the last day. The text also addresses practical logistics, mandating church support for the families of missionaries and condemning idleness within the church structure.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, William E. McLellin, Luke Johnson, Orson Hyde, Samuel H. Smith, Lyman Johnson, Orson Pratt

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL ETERNAL LIFE VIA LABOR

Assertion: Eternal life, glory, and honor are rewards granted 'if ye are faithful' in the specific work of proclaiming the gospel and pruning the vineyard.

"And thus, if ye are faithful ye shall be laden with many sheaves, and crowned with honor, and glory, and immortality, and eternal life. (D&C 75:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, eternal life is the immediate possession of the believer upon justification by faith alone (John 5:24, Romans 6:23). Works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation. D&C 75:5 inverts this by establishing a conditional 'if/then' structure where the 'crown' of eternal life is contingent upon the 'faithfulness' of the laborer in their missionary assignment. This shifts the basis of assurance from Christ's finished work to the believer's ongoing performance in ministry.

2. JUDICIAL AUTHORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: Missionaries have the authority to condemn rejecting households and will personally act as their judges at the last day.

"And know this, that in the day of judgment you shall be judges of that house, and condemn them (D&C 75:21)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Bible teaches that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22) and that Christ alone is the mediator and judge (2 Timothy 4:1). While believers will participate in judgment in a subordinate, eschatological sense (1 Corinthians 6:2), D&C 75:21 grants specific, condemnatory judicial power to human elders over specific households based on their reception of the message. This elevates the priesthood holder to a mediatorial role that infringes upon the unique office of Christ.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of authority. In D&C 75, 'eternal life' is the capstone of a life of faithful labor ('if ye are faithful... ye shall be crowned'). This is the 'Gospel of Merit.' In contrast, the Evangelical 'Gospel of Grace' posits that eternal life is the present possession of the believer, secured by Christ's merit alone. Additionally, the text empowers missionaries to act as eschatological judges over those who reject them, a usurpation of Christ's unique role that suggests a lower view of human depravity (implying humans are righteous enough to judge) and a lower view of Christ's unique exaltation.

Shared Values:

Zeal for evangelism; Reliance on the Holy Spirit (Comforter) for guidance; Importance of supporting families; Rejection of laziness/idleness

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Eternal life is presented as a conditional reward for faithful missionary work ('if ye are faithful... crowned with... eternal life').
2. [Major] Christology (Christ as Sole Judge) – Assigns the role of final judgment and condemnation to human elders ('you shall be judges of that house, and condemn them').

Semantic Warnings:

"Eternal Life"

In Text: Exaltation in the highest degree of glory, conditional upon faithful service and priesthood ordinances.

Evangelical: The gift of God, synonymous with salvation, possessed by all believers in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23).

Example: *In v5, 'eternal life' is the reward at the end of the labor; in John 3:36, 'he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life' (present tense).*

"The Comforter"

In Text: A source of revelation that confirms the specific logistical commands of the Mormon priesthood.

Evangelical: The Holy Spirit who glorifies Christ and convicts the world of sin (John 16:8-14).

Example: *In v27, the Comforter tells them 'whither they shall go' geographically; in the Bible, the Spirit guides into all truth concerning Christ.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Immortality and Eternal Life (v5), framed as the ultimate reward for faithfulness.

How Attained: Through faithfulness in fulfilling church assignments, laboring with might, and enduring to the end.

Basis of Assurance: Performance-based: 'If ye are faithful... ye shall be laden with many sheaves.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. The text says 'If ye are faithful [in work]... ye shall be crowned.' The Bible says 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us' (Titus 3:5).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go forth and do not tarry
2. Labor with might
3. Lift up voices as with the sound of a trump
4. Call on the name of the Lord for the Comforter
5. Provide for families (if not traveling)
6. Obtain places for families (if traveling)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept specific companionship assignments without debate
2. Depend on the Church structure for family sustenance while deployed
3. Maintain constant spiritual productivity (avoiding idleness)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Shaking off the dust of feet as a testimony against those who reject the message (v20)
2. Leaving a blessing upon houses that receive the message (v19)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 5, it says 'if ye are faithful' you will be crowned with eternal life. How do you interpret that 'if'? Does it create anxiety about whether you've been faithful enough?
2. Verse 21 says missionaries will be the judges of the people who rejected them. How does that fit with your understanding of Jesus being the one who judges the hearts of men?
3. When you read about the 'idler' having no place in the church (v29), how does that impact your understanding of God's grace for those who are struggling or weak?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Vineyard Laborer – Just as the text calls for laborers, Jesus said the harvest is plentiful but laborers are few. However, in the Gospel, we labor **from** a position of acceptance, not **for** it. [Matthew 9:37-38 (The Harvest), Ephesians 2:10 (Created for good works, not saved by them)]
2. The Need for the Comforter – The text recognizes the inability of man to do God's work without divine aid. This points to the Christian doctrine of the indwelling Spirit. [John 14:16-17, Acts 1:8]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Uncertainty [Severe] – The conditional 'If ye are faithful' attached to the promise of eternal life creates a perpetual burden. The adherent can never be sure if their labor was sufficient to merit the 'crown.'
2. Burden of Judgment [Moderate] – Placing the responsibility on the missionary to 'shake off the dust' and stand as a judge against rejecting households imposes a heavy, non-biblical spiritual weight. It requires the adherent to assume a posture of condemnation rather than solely an ambassador of reconciliation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Subjective Confirmation (The Comforter).

Verification Method: Adherents are told to call upon the Comforter to teach them 'all things' (v10) and to know where to go (v27).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the objective standard of Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). D&C 75 relies on internal revelation and the dictates of the prophet, creating a closed loop where the 'Comforter' confirms the prophet's words.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: January 25, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith (claimed dictation from God)

Textual Issues: This section combines two separate revelations given on the same day into one text. The editing process of the D&C often involved revising earlier revelations to fit developing theology, though this section is largely administrative.