

Mormon Doctrine of God: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines the Mormon doctrine of God from a Christian perspective. Is their view of God consistent with the biblical view?

Monotheism or Polytheism?

The Mormons consider themselves to be Christian, but many question this claim. In this article we will investigate the teaching of Mormonism regarding the doctrine of God and compare it with Biblical teaching. Mormon doctrine is derived from four primary sources. The first is the Bible; the second are the sacred texts of Mormonism, the *Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. The third comes from the writings of the founder of the church Joseph Smith, and the fourth is the writings of church leaders, especially the church presidents who are considered to be inspired prophets of God. In regard to the God of the Bible, Stephen Robinson, chairman of the Department of Ancient Scriptures at Brigham Young University, writes, "The Latter-day Saints (should) be considered worshipers of the one true God."^{1} He also states, "The Latter-day Saints accept unequivocally all the biblical teachings on the nature of God."^{2} Christianity has taught monotheism from its foundation, the belief in the existence of one God. Mormonism believes in the existence of a plurality of gods. According to Mormonism, there are an infinite number of planets like earth in the universe, each with their god or gods who were once men who have evolved into godhood. Mormon theologian and Apostle Bruce McConkie states, "[A] plurality of gods exist . . . there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods."^{3} Joseph Smith wrote, "In the beginning, the

head of the gods called a council of the gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and (the) people in it.”^{4} The *Pearl of Great Price* states in the Book of Abraham, “And they (the gods) said: let there be light and there was light. And they (the gods) comprehended the light, . . . and the gods called the light Day and the darkness they called Night. . . .” In these two chapters, the plural designation “gods” is used over fifty times. Although they believe that numerous gods exist, Mormons consider themselves to be monotheists because they focus their worship exclusively on the Godhead of this earth. With this being the case, a more accurate description of Mormon practice is *henotheism*, a form of polytheism that stresses a central deity. The Bible clearly teaches monotheism. This truth is taught in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Isaiah writes about God, “Before me there was no god formed, nor will there be one after me.” There was no god created before or any to come for there is only one God. Later he adds, “You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock: I know not one.” God knows of no other, not because God is limited in knowledge, but because there is no other like Him in existence.

Doctrine of the Trinity

Christians and Mormons share many similar theological terms. We both refer to God, salvation, and heaven. However, the words often have radically different meanings. Such is the case with the doctrine of the Trinity. Biblical Christianity teaches there is one God eternally coexisting in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As we will see, the Mormon view of the Godhead is quite different. The Mormons reject the traditional Christian view of the Trinity as being in error. Joseph Smith wrote,

Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God

[anyhow]—three in one and one in three. . .It is curious organization All are crammed into one God according to sectarianism (Christian faith). It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster. (Joseph Smith, Teachings, 372)

Church president James Talmage stated, “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are as distinct in persons and individualities as are any three personages in mortality.”^{5} Mormons believe that there are an infinite number of planets, each with their own god or gods. On this earth, there are three separate gods, God the Father or Elohim, Jehovah or Jesus the son, and the Holy Ghost who make up the Godhead. Instead of Trinitarian, *tritheistic* would be a better word to describe Mormon belief. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, “There are three Gods—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”^{6} He further explains that, “[T]hree separate personages—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a god, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of gods exists. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only gods we worship.”^{7} Jesus is believed by Mormons to be the literal offspring of the Father. The Mormon Church teaches that “Jesus Christ is the son of Elohim both as (a) spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed his mission in the flesh. . . .”^{8} The Bible teaches that there is only one true God, not three separate gods. Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” God has revealed Himself in three coeternal and coequal persons of the same substance or essence, however, distinct in subsistence. The Bible reveals that all three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have the attributes of deity. All three have existed for eternity, took part in creation, and play a role in salvation. The whole, undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three

Persons. [{9}](#)

God Was Once a Man

As we discussed earlier, Mormon theology teaches that there is a plurality of gods. All gods were once mortal men on other planets who, through obedience to the commands of their God, attained exaltation or godhood. All Mormon men have the potential of attaining godhood as well. God's progression from man to God is clearly stated throughout Mormon literature. Joseph Smith wrote:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! . . . I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. . . . He was once a man like us; yea that God himself, the Father dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did. . . .

. [{10}](#)

Brigham Young, the second president taught “[T]hat God the Father was once a man on another planet who ‘passed the ordeal we are now passing through. . . .’” [{11}](#) The *Doctrine and Covenants* states, “God is a glorified and perfected man, a personage of flesh and bones. Inside his tangible body is an eternal spirit.” (130:22) Jesus is believed to have been a mortal man who attained godhood and showed that all men can do the same. The goal of every Mormon man is to achieve exaltation to godhood. Bruce McConkie states, “That exaltation which the saints of all ages have so devoutly sought is godhood itself.” [{12}](#) Joseph Smith exhorted all Mormon men to strive for this goal. He stated,

Here then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have

done before you. . . .{13}

The Mormon Church teaches that if a couple marries according to Mormon ceremony, and each lives an obedient life, they may attain godhood at the resurrection. The *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches,

[Y]e shall come forth in the first resurrection; . . . and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths . . . (and you) shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to (their) exaltation.” (132)

The passage concludes, “Then they shall be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting because they continue. . . . Then they shall be gods because they have all power, and the angels are subject to them.” (132:20) The Bible teaches that God has always been God. Psalm 90 states, “From everlasting to everlasting you are God.” God did not evolve from mortal man. Isaiah 43 reveals, “Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.” This verse destroys any hope of any man thinking he may become a god.

Celestial Parenthood

In Mormon theology, there are three levels of heaven, terrestrial, tellestial, and celestial. It teaches that almost everyone will make it to the first level, terrestrial, but Mormons seek entrance to celestial heaven, because there they are exalted to godhood. Once a man is exalted to godhood, he and his wife will reproduce offspring for eternity. These spirit children will in turn inhabit physical bodies and have the opportunity to become gods as well. This privilege is reserved for those who go through the sacred marriage ceremony in the Temple and live in obedience to Mormon teachings. As we discussed previously, the Mormon book *Doctrine and Covenants*

teaches that Mormons who marry within the context of the church, and remain obedient, shall be resurrected together. They shall then inherit thrones and kingdoms and are then declared gods because they will then rule together for eternity. Church president James Talmage adds, “[W]e are to understand that only resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring . . . and the spirits born to them in the eternal worlds will pass in due sequence through the several stages or estates by which the glorified parents have attained exaltation.”[{14}](#) God the Father is, therefore, believed to be married to God the Mother, and together they are producing spirit children. Bruce McConkie states, “An exalted and glorified man of holiness could not be a Father unless a woman of like glory, perfection, and holiness was associated with him as a Mother. The begetting of children makes a man a father and a woman a mother whether we are dealing with man in his mortal or immortal state.”[{15}](#) All men and women are thus the offspring of this heavenly union. James Talmage wrote, “God the Eternal Father, whom we designate by the exalted name-title ‘Elohim,’ is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and of the spirits of the human race.”[{16}](#) The Bible teaches that God the Father is not married. Isaiah 46:9 states, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God; and there is none like me.” The Bible teaches that men and women who receive Christ as their savior will be glorified and live eternally in the presence of God. However, they will never be equal to God, nor will they be married. If marriage were essential to attain exaltation, it seems strange that Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 7, “It is good for a man not to marry.” When Jesus was questioned about the state of marriage in eternity he said, “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, they will be like the angels in heaven.” The covenant of marriage is for our earthly existence only. The Bible does not teach a doctrine of celestial parenthood.

God is a Physical Being

Christianity teaches that God is immaterial. Mormonism teaches that God has a physical body. The Mormon *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's, the Son also. . . ." [{17}](#) Brigham Young wrote, "We cannot believe for a moment that God is destitute of body, parts, passions, or attributes." [{18}](#) Although John 4:24 clearly teaches that God is spirit, Mormons like Bruce McConkie teach that this is a mistranslation of the text. He writes:

False creeds teach that God is a spirit essence that fills the immensity of space. . . . In a vain attempt to support this doctrine, formulated by councils in the early days of the great apostasy, it is common for apologists to point to the statement in the KJV Bible, which says, "God is a Spirit." The fact is that this passage is mistranslated: instead the correct statement, quoted in context reads: "For unto such hath God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth." [{19}](#)

However, there is no justification for McConkie's translation. The KJV translation of "God is a spirit" is misleading; modern translators are more accurate rendering the passage "God is spirit." The Greek construction and word order place the emphasis on the essential character of God; thus the essence of true worship must be on God's terms and in accord with his nature. [{20}](#) Jesus further taught in Luke 24:36-43, "[A] spirit does not have flesh and bones." 1 Timothy 1:17 states, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God." God is invisible because He is immaterial. 1 John 4:12 and John 1:18 tell us that no one has seen God. The second of the Ten Commandments forbids anyone from making an image of God, partially because nothing physical could accurately reflect God, who is immaterial. If God created the universe, as the Bible teaches, He could not be a physical being. Scripture

often uses anthropomorphic language, attributing human characteristics to God to help describe God's activities. Psalm 17 pleads, "Keep me (Lord) as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings." Mormons have used this kind of language to prove that God has a physical body. In doing so they ignore the use of figurative language. God no more has a physical eye than He has wings and feathers. God also revealed Himself in temporary physical forms that men could understand called theophanies. Examples are the burning bush, the fiery cloud in Exodus, and the unique incarnation of Christ. God the Son humbled Himself and took on human form. He was not a preexistent spirit-being, waiting for a body, as the Mormons teach. John 1 reveals that the Son was God from eternity and became a man to redeem humanity. We must conclude, based on our study of the doctrine of God, that Mormonism and traditional Christianity are indeed two different religions. **Notes** 1. Stephen Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 65; quoted in John Ankerberg, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Mormonism*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 99. 2. *Ibid.*, 103. 3. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1991), 576-577. 4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 349; quoted in Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 220. 5. James Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book Company, 1984), 37. 6. McConkie, 317. 7. McConkie, 576. 8. Talmage, 421. 9. Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988), 54. 10. Smith, 321. 11. Brigham Young, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 29. 12. McConkie, 321. 13. Smith, p. 345-347. Also quoted in McConkie, 321. 14. Talmage, 426. 15. McConkie, 516. 16. Talmage, 421. 17. *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:22. 18. Young, 29. 19. McConkie, 218. 20. *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. **Bibliography** *Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1986 *Doctrine and Covenants*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ

of Latter-day Saints, 1982. *Pearl of Great Price*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982. Ankerberg, John & John Weldon. *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1992. Beckwith, Francis, Norman Geisler, Ron Rhodes, Phil Roberts, Jerald and Sandra Tanner. *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998. Blomberg, Craig, & Stephen Robinson. *How Wide the Divide?* Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997. Martin, Walter. *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997. McConkie, Bruce. *Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1991. Ostling, Richard. *Mormon America*. San Francisco: Harper and Collins Publishers, 1999. Richards, LeGrand. *A Marvelous Work and Wonder*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976. Talmage, James. *The Articles of Faith*. Salt Lake: Deseret Book Company, Revised Edition 1984. Young, Brigham. *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997. ©2001 Probe Ministries.