

# The Value of Suffering: A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin looks at suffering from a Christian perspective. Applying a biblical worldview to this difficult subject results in a distinctly different approach to suffering than our natural inclination of blame and self pity.*

*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*



*There is no such thing as pointless pain in the life of the child of God. How this has encouraged and strengthened me in the valleys of suffering and pain! In this essay I'll be discussing the value of suffering, an unhappy non-negotiable of life in a fallen world.*

## Suffering Prepares Us to Be the Bride of Christ

Among the many reasons God allows us to suffer, this is my personal favorite: it prepares us to be the radiant bride of Christ. The Lord Jesus has a big job to do, changing His ragamuffin church into a glorious bride worthy of the Lamb. Ephesians 5:26-27 tells us He is making us holy by washing us with the Word—presenting us to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. Suffering develops holiness in unholy people. But *getting there* is painful in the Lord's "laundry room." When you use bleach to get rid of stains, it's a harsh process. Getting rid of wrinkles is even more painful: ironing means a combination of heat plus pressure. Ouch! No wonder suffering hurts!



But developing holiness in us is a worthwhile, extremely important goal for the Holy One who is our divine Bridegroom. We learn in Hebrews 12:10 that we are enabled to share in His

holiness through the discipline of enduring hardship. More  
ouch! Fortunately, the same book assures us that discipline is  
a sign of God's love (Heb. 12:6). Oswald Chambers reminds us  
that "God has one destined end for mankind—holiness. His one  
aim is the production of saints."[\[1\]](#)

It's also important for all wives, but most especially the  
future wife of the Son of God, to have a submissive heart.  
Suffering makes us more determined to obey God; it teaches us  
to be submissive. The psalmist learned this lesson as he wrote  
in Psalm 119:67: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but  
now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so  
that I might learn your decrees."

The Lord Jesus has His work cut out for Him in purifying us  
for Himself (Titus 2:14). Let's face it, left to ourselves we  
are a dirty, messy, fleshly people, and we desperately need to  
be made pure. As hurtful as it is, suffering can purify us if  
we submit to the One who has a loving plan for the pain.

Jesus wants not just a *pure* bride, but a mature one as  
well—and suffering produces growth and maturity in us. James  
1:2-4 reminds us that trials produce perseverance, which makes  
us mature and complete. And Romans 5:3-4 tells us that we can  
actually rejoice in our sufferings, because, again, they  
produce perseverance, which produces character, which produces  
hope. The Lord is creating for Himself a bride with sterling  
character, but it's not much fun getting there. I like  
something else Oswald Chambers wrote: "Sorrow burns up a great  
amount of shallowness."[\[2\]](#)

We usually don't have much trouble understanding that our  
Divine Bridegroom loves us; but we can easily forget how much  
He longs for us to love Him back. Suffering scoops us out,  
making our hearts bigger so that we can hold more love for  
Him. It's all part of a well-planned courtship. He does know  
what He's doing . . . we just need to trust Him.

# Suffering Allows Us to Minister Comfort to Others Who Suffer

One of the most rewarding reasons that suffering has value is experienced by those who can say with conviction, “I know how you feel. I’ve been in your shoes.” Suffering prepares us to minister comfort to others who suffer.

Feeling isolated is one of the hardest parts of suffering. It can feel like you’re all alone in your pain, and that makes it so much worse. The comfort of those who have known that same pain is inexpressible. It feels like a warm blanket being draped around your soul. But in order for someone to say those powerful words—“I know just how you feel because I’ve been there”—that person had to walk through the same difficult valley first.

Ray and I lost our first baby when she was born too prematurely to survive. It was the most horrible suffering we’ve ever known. But losing Becky has enabled me to weep with those who weep with the comforting tears of one who has experienced that deep and awful loss. It’s a wound that—by God’s grace—has never fully healed so that I can truly empathize with others out of the very real pain I still feel. Talking about my loss puts me in touch with the unhealed part of the grief and loss that will always hurt until I see my daughter again in heaven. One of the most incredibly comforting things we can ever experience is someone else’s tears for us. So when I say to a mother or father who has also lost a child, “I hurt with you, because I’ve lost a precious one too,” my tears bring warmth and comfort in a way that someone who has never known that pain cannot offer.

One of the most powerful words of comfort I received when we were grieving our baby’s loss was from a friend who said, “Your pain may not be about just you. It may well be about other people, preparing you to minister comfort and hope to

someone in your future who will need what you can give them because of what you're going through right now. And if you are faithful to cling to God now, I promise He will use you greatly to comfort others later." That perspective was like a sweet balm to my soul, because it showed me that my suffering was not pointless.

There's another aspect of bringing comfort to those in pain. Those who have suffered tend not to judge others experiencing similar suffering. Not being judged is a great comfort to those who hurt. When you're in pain, your world narrows down to mere survival, and it's easy for others to judge you for not "following the rules" that should only apply to those whose lives aren't being swallowed by the pain monster.

Suffering often develops compassion and mercy in us. Those who suffer tend to have tender hearts toward others who are in pain. We can comfort others with the comfort that we have received from God (2 Cor. 1:4) because we have experienced the reality of the Holy Spirit being there for us, walking alongside us in our pain. Then we can turn around and walk alongside others in their pain, showing the compassion that our own suffering has produced in us.

## **Suffering Develops Humble Dependence on God**

Marine Corps recruiter Randy Norfleet survived the Oklahoma City bombing despite losing 40 percent of his blood and needing 250 stitches to close his wounds. He never lost consciousness in the ambulance because he was too busy praying prayers of thanksgiving for his survival. When doctors said he would probably lose the sight in his right eye, Mr. Norfleet said, "Losing an eye is a small thing. Whatever brings you closer to God is a blessing. Through all this I've been brought closer to God. I've become more dependent on Him and less on myself." [\[3\]](#)

Suffering is excellent at teaching us humble dependence on God, the only appropriate response to our Creator. Ever since the fall of Adam, we keep forgetting that God created us to depend on Him and not on ourselves. We keep wanting to go our own way, pretending that we are God. Suffering is powerfully able to get us back on track.

Sometimes we hurt so much we can't pray. We are forced to depend on the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the saints, needing them to go before the throne of God on our behalf. Instead of seeing that inability to pray as a personal failure, we can rejoice that our perception of being totally needy corresponds to the truth that we really are that needy. 2 Corinthians 1:9 tells us that hardships and sufferings happen "so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

Suffering brings a "one day at a time-ness" to our survival. We get to the point of saying, "Lord, I can only make it through today if You help me . . . if You take me through today . . . or the next hour . . . or the next few minutes." One of my dearest friends shared with me the prayer from a heart burning with emotional pain: "Papa, I know I can make it through the next fifteen minutes if You hold me and walk me through it." Suffering has taught my friend the lesson of total, humble dependence on God.

As painful as it is, suffering strips away the distractions of life. It forces us to face the fact that we are powerless to change other people and most situations. The fear that accompanies suffering drives us to the Father like a little kid burying his face in his daddy's leg. Recognizing our own powerlessness is actually the key to experience real power because we have to acknowledge our dependence on God before His power can flow from His heart into our lives.

The disciples experienced two different storms out on the lake. The Lord's purpose in both storms was to train them to

stop relying on their physical eyes and use their spiritual eyes. He wanted them to grow in trust and dependence on the Father. He allows us to experience storms in our lives for the same purpose: to learn to depend on God.

I love this paraphrase of Romans 8:28: "The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but He has most certainly permitted it. Therefore, though it were an attack of an enemy, by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord's permission, and therefore all is well. He will make it work together with all life's experiences for good."

## **Suffering Displays God's Strength Through Our Weakness**

*God never wastes suffering, not a scrap of it. He redeems all of it for His glory and our blessing.* The classic Scripture for the concept that suffering displays God's strength through our weakness is found in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, where we learn that God's grace is sufficient for us, for His power is perfected in weakness. Paul said he delighted in weaknesses, hardships, and difficulties "for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Our culture disdains weakness, but our frailty is a sign of God's workmanship in us. It gets us closer to what we were created to be—completely dependent on God. Several years ago I realized that instead of despising the fact that polio had left me with a body that was weakened and compromised, susceptible to pain and fatigue, I could choose to rejoice in it. My weakness made me more like a fragile, easily broken window than a solid brick wall. But just as sunlight pours through a window but is blocked by a wall, I discovered that other people could see God's strength and beauty in me because of the window-like nature of my weakness! Consider how the Lord Jesus was the exact representation of the glory of the Father—I mean, He was all window and no walls! He was

completely dependent on the Father, choosing to become weak so that God's strength could shine through Him. And He was the strongest person the world has ever seen. Not His own strength; He displayed the Father's strength because of that very weakness.

The reason His strength can shine through us is because we know God better through suffering. One wise man I heard said, "I got theology in seminary, but I learned reality through trials. I got facts in Sunday School, but I learned faith through trusting God in difficult circumstances. I got truth from studying, but I got to know the Savior through suffering."

Sometimes our suffering isn't a consequence of our actions or even someone else's. God is teaching other beings about Himself and His loved ones—us—as He did with Job. The point of Job's trials was to enable heavenly beings to see God glorified in Job. Sometimes He trusts us with great pain in order to make a point, whether the intended audience is believers, unbelievers, or the spirit realm. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada, no stranger to great suffering, writes, "Whether a godly attitude shines from a brain-injured college student or from a lonely man relegated to a back bedroom, the response of patience and perseverance counts. God points to the peaceful attitude of suffering people to teach others about Himself. He not only teaches those we rub shoulders with every day, but He instructs the countless millions of angels and demons. The hosts in heaven stand amazed when they observe God sustain hurting people with His peace."[\[4\]](#)

I once heard Charles Stanley say that nothing attracts the unbeliever like a saint suffering successfully. Joni Tada said, "You were made for one purpose, and that is to make God real to those around you."[\[5\]](#) The reality of God's power, His love, and His character are made very, very real to a watching world when we trust Him in our pain.

# Suffering Gets Us Ready for Heaven

Pain is inevitable because we live in a fallen world. 1 Thessalonians 3:3 reminds us that we are “destined for trials.” We don’t have a choice whether we will suffer—our choice is to go through it by ourselves or with God.

Suffering teaches us the difference between the important and the transient. It prepares us for heaven by teaching us how unfulfilling life on earth is and helping us develop an eternal perspective. Suffering makes us homesick for heaven.

Deep suffering of the soul is also a taste of hell. After many sleepless nights wracked by various kinds of pain, my friend Jan now knows what she was saved from. Many Christians only know they’re saved without grasping what it is Christ has delivered them from. Jan’s suffering has given her an appreciation of the reality of heaven, and she’s been changed forever.

I have an appreciation of heaven gained from a different experience. As my body weakens from the lifelong impact of polio, to be honest, I have a deep frustration with it that makes me grateful for the perfect, beautiful, completely working resurrection body waiting for me on the other side. My husband once told me that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Suffering has done that for me. Paul explained what happens in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

*“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

One of the effects of suffering is to loosen our grasp on this life, because we shouldn’t be thinking that life in a fallen



world is as wonderful as we sometimes think it is. Pastor Dick Bacon once said, "If this life were easy, we'd just love it too much. If God didn't make it painful, we'd never let go of it." Suffering reminds us that we live in an abnormal world. Suffering is abnormal—our souls protest, "This isn't right!" We need to be reminded that we are living in the post-fall "Phase 2." The perfect Phase 1 of God's beautiful, suffering-free creation was ruined when Adam and Eve fell. So often, people wonder what kind of cruel God would deliberately make a world so full of pain and suffering. They've lost track of history. The world God originally made isn't the one we experience. Suffering can make us long for the new heaven and the new earth where God will set all things right again.

Sometimes suffering literally prepares us for heaven. Cheryl's in-laws, both beset by lingering illnesses, couldn't understand why they couldn't just die and get it over with. But after three long years of holding on, during a visit from Cheryl's pastor, the wife trusted Christ on her deathbed and the husband received assurance of his salvation. A week later the wife died, followed in six months by her husband. They had continued to suffer because of God's mercy and patience, who did not let them go before they were ready for heaven.

Suffering dispels the cloaking mists of inconsequential distractions of this life and puts things in their proper perspective. My friend Pete buried his wife a few years ago after a battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. One morning I learned that his car had died on the way to church, and I said something about what a bummer it was. Pete just shrugged and said, "This is nothing." That's what suffering will do for us. Trials are light and momentary afflictions . . . but God redeems them all.

## Notes

1. Oswald Chambers, *Our Utmost for His Highest*, September 1.
2. Chambers, June 25.
3. *National and International Religion Report*, Vol. 9:10, May

1, 1995, 1

4. Joni Eareckson Tada, *When Is It Right to Die?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 122.

5. Tada, 118.

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## Abortion: A Biblical View

*Sue Bohlin calls for a spiritual and moral reflection on the topic of abortion, urging people to consider the eternal implications and affirming that God's love, grace, and forgiveness extend even to those who have committed this sin.*



*An earlier version of this article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## Abortion as Spiritual Warfare

Abortion continues to be a volatile issue, and an emotional one, in the United States. It is usually seen as a political issue, but I think it's way bigger than that.

I believe we need to see abortion as spiritual warfare.



We live in two dimensions at the same time: the physical world that we can see and touch and measure, and the unseen spiritual realm that is filled with God, angels and demons (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Jesus revealed to us that Satan is the thief who “comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10); abortion is one of the most wicked, heinous ways he

inflicts pain and destruction on people God loves.

He steals joy and peace from women who have had abortions, as well as some of the fathers of the babies who were killed in the womb. He steals babies from what should be the safest place on earth. He steals motherhood from women and fatherhood from men. Through abortion, he steals grandchildren from grandparents.

Satan uses abortion to kill. Just in the United States, since Roe v. Wade made abortion legal, over 64 million babies have been murdered.[{1}](#) In China, the horrible one-child policy that terrorized the Chinese people for 35 years resulted in 350 million baby deaths.[{2}](#)

Satan uses abortion to destroy. Willingly choosing abortion for a pregnant teenager has been Satan's foothold in many families that were torn apart, a phenomenon I have seen with my own eyes. Abortion—and its evil twin infanticide—destroyed the natural ratio of boys to girls in China. Today, there are 30 million young men who cannot find a girl to marry because there aren't enough to go around.[{3}](#)

The rallying cry of abortion is, "It's my body"—even though there is another human being's body involved as well. Theologian Dr. Peter Kreeft's insight is breathtaking to me: "Abortion is the Antichrist's demonic parody of the Eucharist. That is why it uses the same holy words, 'This is my body,' with the blasphemously opposite meaning."[{4}](#)

Abortion is an evil weapon in the hands of an unspeakably evil enemy. In Genesis 3, Satan declared war on the people God created and loves, and he has been warring with us ever since. The Lord Jesus triumphed over this defeated foe at the cross, but He allows battles to continue on this side of eternity to strengthen us and help us learn to depend on Him and grow stronger in our faith. In this article we'll be talking about the spiritual battlefield of abortion, but please remember

that not only does Jesus win in the end, He has provided us with spiritual armor that starts with TRUTH. Let's go there now.

## **The Bible's View of the Unborn**

Pro-choice advocates don't like the use of the word "murder." Many of them maintain that no one really knows when human life begins, and they choose to believe that the idea of personhood at conception is a religious tenet and therefore not valid. But it is a human life that is formed at conception. The zygote contains 46 chromosomes, half contributed by each parent, in a unique configuration that has never existed before and never will again. It is not plant life or animal life, nor is it mere tissue like a tumor. From the moment of conception, the new life is genetically different from his or her mother, and is not a part of her body like her tonsils or appendix. This new human being is a separate individual living inside the mother. Rather like an astronaut being protected and kept alive in space.

The Bible doesn't specifically address the subject of abortion, probably since it is covered in the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder." (Exodus 20:13) But it does give us insight into God's view of the unborn. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for the unborn (*yeled*) is the same word used for young children. The Hebrew language did not have or need a separate word for pre-born babies. All children were children regardless of whether they lived inside or outside the womb. In the New Testament, the same word is used to describe the unborn John the Baptist and the already-born baby Jesus. The process of birth just doesn't make any difference concerning a baby's worth or status in the Bible.

We are given some wonderful insights into God's intimate involvement in the development and life of the pre-born infant in Psalm 139:13-16:

For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully  
and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place.  
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,  
your eyes saw my unformed body.  
All the days ordained for me  
were written in your book before one of them came to be.

All people, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, or whether they are healthy or handicapped, are God's image bearers who have been personally knit together by His fingers. He has planned out all the days of the unborn child's life before one of them has happened.

## **Chemical Abortion: "The Abortion Pill"**

Chemical abortions now account for the majority of induced abortions in the U.S.[{5}](#)

Two drugs are used in tandem to end a pregnancy. The first pill, RU-46 or Mifepristone or Mifeprex (all the same drug), shuts down progesterone. That's the pregnancy hormone that the developing embryo or fetus needs to survive and thrive. Progesterone allows the mother's body to feed and nourish and oxygenate the baby. The first abortion pill blocks progesterone, so the baby dies. Then the next drug, Misoprostol or Cytotec, causes the uterus to contract and squeeze out the baby and other pregnancy tissue like the placenta.[{6}](#)

These drugs are very disruptive to the natural progress of growing a baby inside a womb. They are unfortunately quite effective up to seven weeks' gestation, and then their effectiveness drops off. By the time the baby is ten weeks

along, for one in six women the drugs won't fully empty the uterus. Dangerous complications can set in, like:

- An infection caused by an incomplete or failed abortion where the fetus remains in the uterus
- An undetected ectopic pregnancy, which can be dangerous and is a medical emergency
- Blood clots remaining in the uterus
- Heavy bleeding

What is also scary is that chemical abortions are so easy to obtain they are like over-the-counter medications. No doctor is needed to supervise. If a woman has an ectopic pregnancy, where the embryo grows in her Fallopian tube instead of her uterus, she's going to have awful pain and needs a sonogram to see where the baby is. Some of the deaths from Mifeprex abortions were from women that never had an ultrasound; they were given the drug and they had a pregnancy in their tube, and they died.

Thousands of women experience complications, called "adverse events" that require hospital intervention, but the FDA does not require adverse events to be reported unless someone dies. The abortion pill is being touted as being "safe as Tylenol," which is a life-threatening lie.[\[7\]](#) But then, abortion is spiritual warfare, and the enemy constantly lies and deceives us.

But there is good news! Many times, even while swallowing the abortion pills and immediately afterwards, women wrestle with regret for starting the regimen. There is a protocol called [Abortion Pill Reversal](#) where a doctor prescribes a dose of progesterone, the pregnancy hormone, to counteract what the mifepristone did. If started quickly enough within 72 hours of a woman taking mifepristone and before she takes the second drug, there is about a 70% chance of saving her child![\[8\]](#)  
Thank You Lord!

# Handicapped Children

What if prenatal tests reveal that a baby is going to be born sick or handicapped? There's no doubt about it, raising a handicapped child is painful and hard. Is it ever okay to abort a child whose life will be less than perfect?

We need to ask ourselves, does the child deserve to die because of his handicap or illness? Life is hard, both for the handicapped person and for her parents. But it is significant that no organization of parents of mentally retarded children has ever endorsed abortion.

Some people honestly believe that it's better to abort a handicapped child than to let him experience the difficult life ahead. Dr. C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the United States, has performed thousands of pediatric surgeries on handicapped children. He remarks that disability and unhappiness do not necessarily go together. Some of the unhappiest children he has known had full mental and physical faculties, and some of the happiest youngsters have borne very difficult burdens.<sup>{9}</sup> Life is a lot harder for people with disabilities, but I can tell you personally that there is a precious side to it as well. [I have lived most of my life with a physical handicap](#), but it hasn't stopped me from experiencing a fierce joy from living life to the fullest of the abilities I *do* have. I can honestly rejoice in my broken body because it is that very brokenness and weakness that makes it easier for others to see the power and glory of my Lord in me, because His power is perfected in weakness.

Often, parents abort children with defects because they don't want to face the certain suffering and pain that comes with caring for a handicapped individual. By aborting the child, they believe they are aborting the trouble. But as we discussed earlier, there is no way to avoid the consequences of abortion: the need to grieve, the guilt, the anger, the depression.

What if a baby is going to die anyway, such as those with fatal genetic birth disorders? I think we need to look at the larger picture, one that includes God and His purposes for our lives. When a tragedy like this occurs, we can know that it is only happening because He has a reason behind it. God's will for us is not that we live easy lives, but that we be changed into the image of Jesus. He wants us to be holy, not comfortable. The pain of difficult circumstances is often His chosen method to grow godliness in us and in the lives of those touched by the tragedy of a child's handicap. When it is a matter of life and death, as abortion is, it is not our place to avoid the pain.

My husband and I know what it is to bury a baby who only lived nine days. We saw God use this situation to draw people to Himself and to teach and strengthen and bless so many people beyond our immediate family. Despite the tremendous pain of that time, now that I have seen how God used it to glorify Himself, I would go through it again.

Not all abortions are performed as a matter of convenience. Some are performed in very hard cases, such as a handicapped child or as the result of rape or incest. But again, we need to back off and view abortion—for whatever reason—from an eternal perspective. God is the One who gives life, and only He has the right to take it away. Every person, born or unborn, is a precious soul made by God, in His image. Every life is an entrustment from God we need to celebrate and protect.

## **Post-Abortion Syndrome**

Millions of women live with the emotional and physical aftershock of abortion. Although some do not seem to have been rocked by their choice, many many women live with deep guilt and shame and denial. Some live with the physical effects of the hormonal shock of suddenly ending the massive construction job of their body building another human being inside her



womb. It's something like throwing a car into park when it was going full speed down the road.

Post-abortion syndrome or stress disorder is real for many women. The grief is real; the deep loss of the child is real. And many people need help facing the pain and getting through it. I asked a dear friend about her experience. It's been 48 years since her abortion. She wrote to me,

"Though the procedure was fairly easy, I knew the second it was over that I had done the wrong thing. I left that clinic empty, guilty, and depressed. It was the start of a lifetime of sadness and regret. I told no one other than my husband and kept that secret for over 30 years. I suffered in silence. I knew then that I had made the choice to end a human life.

"When I became pregnant later, the sadness and guilt actually multiplied. When I could feel the baby inside me, the intense feelings of shame and guilt consumed me for ending my first child's life. When my daughter was born and I held her for the first time and looked into her eyes, as happy as I was to have her, I also felt the worst pain I had ever felt because of what I had done 7 years earlier."

Ending another's life, whether freely chosen or being pressured into it, is capital-T Trauma. The woman is shaped and changed by this trauma, and I am so grateful for abortion recovery programs. They help women (and men, though there are far fewer programs for [Forgotten Fathers](#)) to experience grace and compassion as they confess their sin and receive forgiveness and cleansing from Jesus, *who died for their abortion*.

Abortion is a hard choice for which there are hard consequences. But God's love and compassion and grace are bigger than all of it, and there is such good news in Romans 8:28—God is able to make all things work together for good for

those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

## Notes

1. [nrlc.org/communications/0123saus/](https://nrlc.org/communications/0123saus/)
2. [www.wired.com/story/china-one-child-policy-in-numbers/](https://www.wired.com/story/china-one-child-policy-in-numbers/)
3. [youtu.be/u6t0e7naoEw?si=VGq2XzV8PDsWRfxs](https://youtu.be/u6t0e7naoEw?si=VGq2XzV8PDsWRfxs)
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7. [aaplog.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/20230728-Chem-Ab-One-Page.pdf](https://aaplog.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/20230728-Chem-Ab-One-Page.pdf)
8. [aaplog.org/abortion-pill-reversal/](https://aaplog.org/abortion-pill-reversal/)
9. C. Everett Koop, "The Slide to Auschwitz," in Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 45-46.

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# Mormon Doctrine of Jesus: A Christian Perspective

*Dr. Pat Zukeran looks at a Mormon view of Jesus, comparing it to an authentic Christian perspective. He finds that the Mormon view is not supported by the biblical text.*

## Jesus a Procreated Being?

The Mormon Church claims to have restored the true teachings of Jesus. In this article, we will compare the Mormon doctrine of Jesus to the New Testament.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus, God the Son, is eternal and has no beginning. However, Mormonism teaches that Jesus is a procreated being, the literal offspring of God the Father and one of His heavenly wives. According to Mormon theology, God the Father, Elohim, dwells on a planet with His many spirit wives producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies so that they too may one day ascend to godhood as their parents did. Jesus is believed to be the firstborn spirit child of Elohim. The *Doctrine and Covenants*, one of the four sacred books of Mormonism states, "Christ, the Firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father."[\[1\]](#) The *Gospel Principles*, which is the manual of the Mormon Church, states, "The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ."[\[2\]](#) James Talmage, one of the early apostles of the church wrote, "[A]mong the spirit-children of Elohim, the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors."[\[3\]](#)

According to the Mormon view, Jesus is not unique from the rest of mankind. He is simply the firstborn spirit child. The *Doctrine and Covenants* states, "The difference between Jesus and other offspring of Elohim is one of degree not of kind."[\[4\]](#) That is why Mormons refer to Jesus as elder brother.

James Talmage wrote, "Human beings generally were similarly existent in spirit state prior to their embodiment in the flesh. . . . There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of mankind." [\[5\]](#)

Mormon doctrine deviates significantly from the Bible, which teaches that Jesus is eternal and not procreated. Although Mormons teach that Jesus is eternal, what they mean is that He existed as a spirit child prior to His incarnation. Being an offspring of Elohim means He was created at some point in time.

To support their view, Mormons appeal to John 3:16, which states Jesus is the "only begotten." The Greek word used there is *monogenes*, which means "unique" or "one of a kind." It does not mean procreated, but emphasizes uniqueness.

Mormons also appeal to Colossians 1:15, which calls Christ the "Firstborn over all creation." The Greek word for firstborn is *prototokos*, meaning "first in rank, preeminent one." It carries the idea of positional supremacy. Christ is the firstborn in the sense that He is preeminent over all creation. Renowned Greek scholar, the late F.F. Bruce, wrote on how the term was used during the time in which Paul wrote. "The word firstborn had long since ceased to be used exclusively in its literal sense, just as prime (from the Latin word *primus*—first) with us. The Prime Minister is not the first minister we have had; he is the most preeminent. . . . Similarly, firstborn came to denote (among the ancients) not priority in time but preeminence in rank." [\[6\]](#) Psalm 89:27 in the Septuagint calls David the firstborn. We all know David is not the first-born son in his family, nor is he the first king of Israel. "Firstborn" here is a title of preeminence.

These Bible verses do not support the teaching that Jesus is a procreated being. The Bible further teaches Jesus is an eternal being. He had no beginning.

Colossians 1:17 states, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Christ as the eternal Son of God existed before all creation. Since Christ is "before all things," He did not depend on anyone or anything for His creation or existence.

John 1:1 shows Jesus is eternal and has no beginning. John wrote, "In the beginning was the word." Scripture indicates that the universe was not created in time, but that time itself was created along with the universe.[{7}](#) In other words, time was not already in existence when God created the world. The world was created with time rather than in time. Back before the beginning mentioned in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1 lay a *beginningless* eternity.[{8}](#) The verb *was* is in the imperfect tense, indicating continued existence. So Jesus did not come into existence at some point in eternity past, He always existed. There has never been a point where He was not in existence.

In John 8:58 Jesus tells the religious leaders, "Before Abraham was born, I am." Jesus is identifying Himself as the eternal God, quoting the words from Exodus 3:14. For this reason the Jews were seeking to stone Him for the crime of blasphemy. The words "I am" or "Yahweh" in the Hebrew language is the verb, to be. This name conveys the meaning of eternal self-existence. Yahweh, whom Jesus is identifying with, is eternal and beyond the realm of time. Abraham came to exist at a point in time, but Jesus never had a beginning. He is uncreated and eternal. Since the Bible teaches the eternal nature of Christ, He cannot be a procreated being as Mormon doctrine teaches.

## Lucifer and Jesus

According to Mormon theology, God the Father lives on a planet with His spirit wives procreating spirit children who await physical bodies to inhabit. As we learned earlier, Jesus is the first son born to Elohim. God the Father had numerous

other offspring, which included Lucifer. This makes him a spirit brother of Jesus and of all human beings. Mormon theologian LeGrand Richards writes, "Satan was just as much a man in the spirit world, as were those spirits who have been given bodies through birth in this world."[{9}](#)

Mormonism teaches that Jesus and Lucifer were involved in planning mankind's eternal destiny. In order to attain godhood like our heavenly parents, the spirit children needed to leave the presence of their heavenly Father, inhabit a physical body, and live a worthy life. Elohim knew that mankind would sin and thus require a savior to pay for sin and show us how to return to our heavenly father. At the heavenly council, Jesus and Lucifer proposed their plans. Lucifer offered to go to earth and be the savior but he wanted to force everyone to be saved and do everything himself. Jesus desired to give man the freedom of choice. The Father chose Jesus' plan. Angered by the decision, Lucifer persuaded one third of the spirit children to rebel and a war in heaven took place between Satan's forces and Jesus and His followers. Lucifer was defeated, cast out of heaven, and denied the right to inhabit mortal bodies.[{10}](#) Without the ability to attain physical bodies, exaltation to the Celestial kingdom is impossible. He became known as Satan and his followers became the demons who now exist on earth as spirits opposing God's work.

Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the worlds was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the savior of mankind."[{11}](#)

The Bible teaches that Jesus is not the spirit brother of Lucifer or of human beings. Lucifer is an angel and part of the created order. Ezekiel 28:13-19 reveals that Lucifer, in contrast to Jesus, is a created cherub angel. Colossians 1:16 tells us that Christ is the Creator of all things, including

the angelic realm. The words “thrones”, “dominions”, “principalities” and “powers” were used by rabbinical Jews to describe different orders of angels. In Colossae, there was a problem of worshipping angels. Christ had been degraded to their level. Paul’s argument here is that Christ is superior to the angels for Christ created them. Lucifer falls into this category of a created angel, thus making him a created being. Hebrews 1:4 also reinforces the fact that Jesus, being God the Son, is superior in nature to the angels. Christ is Creator, while Lucifer is creature, two totally different classes and they cannot be spirit brothers as Mormonism teaches.

## **The Incarnation of Christ**

The Mormon doctrine of Jesus deviates from biblical teaching regarding the preincarnate life of Christ. It also deviates in its teaching on the incarnation of Jesus. Mormonism teaches that Jesus’ incarnation was the result of sexual relations between the flesh and bone Heavenly Father and Mary. Jesus is the only earthly offspring so conceived. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, “Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers.”[\[12\]](#)

He also writes, “God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; He was born in the same personal, real and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about this paternity; He was begotten, conceived, and born in the normal and natural course of events, for He is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says.”[\[13\]](#)

James Talmage wrote, “Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as 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.”[\[14\]](#)

Mormon theology teaches that the Father was the main person involved in Mary's conception, not the Holy Spirit. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "Christ is not the Son of the Holy Ghost, but of the Father."[\[15\]](#) Mormon Historian Stephen Robinson states, "Mary was in some unspecified manner made pregnant by God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit."[\[16\]](#) Dr. Robinson attempts to remain faithful to Mormon theology and the Bible, but his attempt falls short.

The Bible makes it clear: Jesus was conceived as the result of a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, not a physical union with the Father. John 4:24 says that God is spirit. He is not a resurrected man.

Luke 1:35 states, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The Holy Spirit's supernatural work in Mary's body enabled Christ—eternal God—to take on human nature. Jesus thus had a dual nature. He was fully God and fully man. Mormons reject this teaching.

Stephen Robinson writes, the "unbiblical doctrine of the two natures in Christ was added to historic Christianity by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D."[\[17\]](#) This might be a consistent conclusion for Mormonism, but it is contrary to the Bible. Throughout the Gospels Jesus showed His humanity: He was hungry, He got tired, and His human body experienced death. However, He also revealed His divinity, demonstrating omnipotence (Colossians 1:17), omniscience (John 2:25), eternity (John 1:1), and omnipresence (Matthew 28:20).

There is a wide separation between the Mormon doctrine of the incarnation of Christ and what the Bible teaches.

## **The Atoning Work of Christ**

Another key area in which Mormon theology deviates from biblical teaching is their view of the atoning work of Christ. To understand this, we must understand the Mormon view of the



fall. According to Mormon theology, Adam was given two conflicting commands by God: one to become mortal and the other not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; out of which mortality, children, and death would result. Adam chose to eat of the fruit for it was the only way salvation could come to mankind.[{18}](#) As a result of the fall, Adam and Eve left their purely spiritual state and became physical beings. Mortality and child bearing would provide the way to exaltation and godhood. Man then inherited a dual nature, one physical and the other spiritual.[{19}](#)

Jesus' death is believed to have atoned for only Adam's sin, leaving us responsible for our sins.[{20}](#) Adam's act brought mortality and death. The result of Jesus' atonement is that all humankind will be resurrected. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "Unconditional salvation, that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law, consists in the mere fact of being resurrected."[{21}](#) The Second Article of Faith states, "We believe that men are responsible for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression."[{22}](#)

In Mormon theology, there is a distinction between general salvation—resurrection for all, and individual salvation which refers to exaltation. Mormonism teaches that that we have all attained universal resurrection as a result of Jesus' death, but we must now earn our own place in heaven by doing all we can do.

Mormonism teaches there are three levels of heaven: telestial is the lowest level, the terrestrial, and celestial. The resurrection of Christ allows non-Mormons entrance to the telestial or terrestrial kingdom. All Mormons desire the celestial level where they attain exaltation to godhood. Attaining to this level depends on their life here on earth. The Mormon Church and Joseph Smith play the major roles in achieving exaltation. The *Gospel Principles* tell us that Jesus "became our savior and He did His part to help us return to our heavenly home. It is now up to each of us to do our part

and become worthy of exaltation.”{23}

The Bible does not equate salvation with resurrection. Jesus’ death provides atonement for all of humanity (Isaiah 53:6), but salvation is contingent on one’s response to Christ’s atoning work. Salvation applies only to those who accept Christ’s work on the cross. It is not universal as in Mormonism.

All mankind will be resurrected, but it is at the resurrection that some will be condemned to hell and others to eternal life in God’s presence (Rev. 20:11-15). Those who reject Christ will not be saved (John 3:18). So resurrection is not equated with salvation.

Finally, individual salvation is by faith alone, not by works. (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is through faith in Jesus alone that one receives the full measure of the gift of salvation. The Bible does not teach three levels of glorification. There is only eternal life with Christ, or eternal separation from God.

## **Jesus the Polygamist?**

As we have studied, the Mormon doctrine of Jesus deviates from the Jesus of the Bible in several key areas. Another unique teaching of Mormonism on the life of Christ is in regards to His marital state. Mormonism teaches that while on earth, Jesus was married to at least three women. Although Mormons today try to distance themselves from this teaching, it is clearly a part of their historical record. Orson Hyde, one of the original Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church and who was ordained by Joseph Smith, cites the gospel of John when he writes, “Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana of Galilee, and He told them what to do. Now there was actually a marriage; and if Jesus was not the bridegroom on that occasion, please tell who was. I shall say here, that before the Savior died, He looked upon his own natural children as we look upon ours.”{24}

Mormonism teaches that Jesus was not only married, but He had a family. In a speech given by Hyde in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, he exclaimed, "I discover that some of the Eastern papers represent me as a great blasphemer, because I said, in my lecture on marriage, at our last conference, that Jesus Christ was married at Cana of Galilee, that Mary, Martha, and others were His wives, and that He begat children. All that I have to say in reply to that charge is this—they worship a Savior that is too pure and holy to fulfil the commands of his Father. I worship one that is just pure and holy enough 'to fulfil all righteousness;' not only the righteous law of baptism, but the still more righteous and important law 'to multiply and replenish the earth.' Startle not at this! For even the Father Himself honored that law by coming down to Mary, without a natural body, and begetting a Son; and if Jesus begat children, He only 'did that which He had seen His Father do.'" {25}

This would be consistent with Mormon theology, since marriage is a requirement for exaltation to godhood. {26}

According to the New Testament, there is no evidence to indicate that Jesus was married or that He had children. It is even more inconceivable that He would enter into a polygamous relationship, for it was not God's intended will for marriage. (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, and 1 Timothy 3)

Our study reveals that the Jesus of Mormonism is not the Jesus of the Bible. The Mormon view of Jesus teaches that He was not eternally God, that He was procreated as the first spirit child of the Father, He is a spirit brother of Lucifer, and was begotten of the Father through physical relations with Mary. For these reasons, we cannot consider the Mormon teachings on Christ to be consistent with the New Testament.

## Notes

1. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21-23.

2. *Gospel Principles*, 11.
3. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 425.
4. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21
5. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 426.
6. F.F. Bruce, *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979) quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 126.
7. Harold Kuhn, "Creation," in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. Henry. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983.), 61, quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
8. Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1983), 996, quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
9. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Publishing Company), 277.
10. *Gospel Principles*, 16-17.
11. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* 193.
12. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 546-547.
13. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 742.
14. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 466.
15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1975), 1:18-20.
16. Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 135.
17. Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 78.
18. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 47.
19. "Church News" in *Deseret News*, July 31, 1965, 7.
20. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder*, 98
21. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 669.
22. *Articles of Faith* 2.
23. *Gospel Principles*, 19.
24. *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, 89.
25. *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 2, p. 210.

26. *Doctrine and Covenants* 132.

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# 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 pre-existent 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.
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# Mormon Beliefs about Prophecy, Heaven, and Celestial Marriage

*Russ Wise demonstrates some ways in which Mormonism cannot be true because of false prophecies. He also examines their beliefs about three levels of heaven, and the concept of being married for eternity, even though scripture contradicts these doctrines.*

## The Book of Mormon: A Superior Revelation or a Hoax?

Missionaries for the Mormon Church have converted millions of people to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by convincing them that the Book of Mormon is true and superior to the Bible.

The Book of Mormon claims to be history of “the period from 600 BC to 421 AD during which the Nephite, Lamanite, and Mulekite civilizations flourished.”[\[1\]](#) It is also believed by the Mormon Church that these civilizations were descendants of Lehi, a Jew who led a colony of people from Jerusalem to the Americas in 600 BC.

The Nephite prophet Mormon and his son Moroni played major roles in bringing the lost story of these civilizations to light. War broke out among the descendants of Lehi, and as



they were about to annihilate one another, Mormon wrote their history on golden plates and hid them in the hill Cumorah in New York state.

According to Bruce R. McConkie, a Mormon scholar, the Book of Mormon has three purposes:

- *To bear record of Christ and clarify his Divine Sonship and mission, proving that he is the Redeemer and Savior;*
- *To teach the doctrines of the gospel in such a perfect way that the plan of salvation will be clearly revealed;*
- *To stand as a witness that Joseph Smith was the Lord's anointed through whom the latter-day work of restoration would be accomplished.*[\[2\]](#) (According to the Mormon Church, Christianity was corrupted after the death of the last apostle and Joseph Smith was anointed by God to restore the true church.)

Referring to the Book of Mormon, the Mormon apostle Orson Pratt, said: "This book must be either true or false. If true, it is one of the most important messages ever sent from God... If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked...impositions ever palmed upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions."[\[3\]](#)

It is imperative that we recognize the Book of Mormon for what it is and challenge those who continue to perpetuate the false idea that it is true. In order for the Book of Mormon to be accepted as divine truth, the Bible must be discredited.

The book of 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon says: "Because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words."[\[4\]](#) Joseph Smith said, "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."[\[5\]](#)

The underlying problem with the Book of Mormon is that there is absolutely no objective, external evidence for much of the information found in the book. And the information that is trustworthy was plagiarized right out of the King James Bible. Beyond the fact that the Book of Mormon cannot be verified externally, the potential convert is told that the Smithsonian Institution uses the Book of Mormon to aid its archaeological work. However, in a letter referring to this Mormon claim, the Smithsonian Institution Department of Anthropology states: "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the Book of Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archaeologists see no connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book."[\[6\]](#)

Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth President of the Church, has unintentionally summarized my thoughts about the Book of Mormon exactly as he stated, "If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to mislead the people, then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false, for the doctrines of an impostor cannot be made to harmonize in all particulars with divine truth. If his claims and declarations were built upon fraud and deceit, there would appear many errors and contradictions which would be easy to detect."[\[7\]](#)

It is interesting to note that there have been close to four thousand corrections made in the Book of Mormon to date. What an epitaph for a "perfect" book of divine teaching.

## **Prophecies That Didn't Come True**

Mormon writers have influenced millions of people over the years and have been instrumental in developing less than truthful statements concerning the church. These statements, or prophecies, must be looked at carefully, then refuted when they miss the mark of legitimacy.

It is imperative that we understand the biblical teaching

regarding a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:20-22 says:

*But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken, the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. . ."*[{8}](#)

If the prophecy does not come to pass, the scripture is plain in stating that the individual is not a prophet of God and that he should be put to death. There is no acceptable average of correctness other than 100% correct, 100% of the time. Anything less had grave consequences.

The president of the Mormon Church is known as the "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator" of the church. It is their duty to divine the word of God, to be His mouthpiece.

Perhaps the most embarrassing prophecy that did not come to pass is the prophecy regarding the temple in Zion. The Doctrine and Covenants, a later book of revelations given by Joseph Smith, says this about the temple:

"Verily this is the word of the Lord, that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the saints, beginning at this place.... For verily this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord. . ."

[{9}](#)

This prophecy was in reference to Jackson County, Missouri. It is interesting to note that this prophecy was given in September of 1832 and that there has not been a temple built as of this date nor within the generation of those living in 1832.

Another prophecy related to the temple in Zion is found in Doctrine and Covenants 97:19. It states: "And the nations of the earth shall honor her, and shall say: Surely Zion is the city of our God, and surely Zion cannot fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there. . ."

Once again it is noteworthy that a temple was not built in Missouri, but that a temple WAS built in Salt Lake City. If the prophecy is true, Salt Lake City cannot be Zion. However, if Salt Lake City is indeed Zion, the prophecy is utterly false.

On another occasion, February 14, 1835, Joseph Smith said that "it was the will of God that those who went to Zion, with a determination to lay down their lives, if necessary, should be ordained to the ministry, and go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, or the coming of the Lord, which was nigh even fifty-six years should wind up the scene."[\[10\]](#) The truth regarding this prophecy that Jesus would return in 56 years is obvious to any living today. His bride is yet waiting His return after one hundred and fifty-five years.

The fact that these and other prophecies of Joseph Smith were not fulfilled leads us to only one conclusion in light of Deuteronomy 18:20-22. Joseph Smith was indeed a false prophet.

## **The Great Restoration or the Great Fabrication?**

The Book of Mormon tells us that many of the truths of the early church were lost when the church fell into apostasy. Joseph Smith taught that after the death of Jesus Christ and the apostles, there was a total apostasy. They further teach that the churches of our day do not represent Christ and have, in fact, done away with many of the original truths of the early church. The Book of Mormon states, "they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they

taken away.”{11}

One major aspect of the restoration which Joseph Smith was called to establish was that of the priesthoods—both the Aaronic and the Melchizedek.

The Mormon Missionary Handbook indicates that the only ones who have the authority to baptize new believers are those who hold the Priesthood in the Mormon Church. However, when one takes a critical look, it is obvious that the concept of reintroducing the priesthoods into the church is an unbiblical endeavor.

This is of primary importance when one realizes that the structure of the Mormon Church is based on the revelation of Joseph Smith.{12} According to the past president of the Mormon Church, Spencer W. Kimball, “The priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth to act in all things pertaining to the salvation of men. It is the means whereby the Lord acts through men to save souls. Without this priesthood power, men are lost.”{13} Bishop H. Burke Peterson declared that the effectiveness of the priest’s authority, or “the power that comes through that authority—depends on the patterns of our lives; it depends on our righteousness.”{14} It is interesting to note that the priest’s power to do the will of God is not given by the Holy Spirit but comes from one’s personal righteousness.

David Witmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had this to say about the Priesthoods: “This matter of ‘Priesthood,’ since the days of Sidney Rigdon, has been the great hobby and stumbling-block of the Latter- Day Saints. Priesthood means authority; and authority is the word we should use. I do not think the word priesthood is mentioned in the New Covenant of the Book of Mormon.”{15} Witmer goes on to say that it was in fact Sydney Rigdon who gave Joseph Smith the idea of reintroducing the Priesthoods. The Mormon Church had been operating for two full years before the establishing

of this new line of authority. About two thousand followers were baptized into the church and confirmed without the advantage of a recognized priest.

David Witmer addresses his remarks to Joseph Smith as he continues his address to all believers in Christ by saying, "You have changed the revelations from the way they were first given and as they are today in the Book of Commandments.... You have changed the revelations to support the error of a President of the high priesthood.... You have altered the revelations to support you in going beyond the plain teachings of Christ in the new covenant part of the Book of Mormon." [\[16\]](#)

Not only does Joseph Smith have problems with his revelation concerning the priesthoods with the authority of the Book of Mormon and David Witmer, but the Bible does not help him either.

It is apparent that when young Joseph was plagiarizing the Bible that he did not look very closely at the book of Hebrews. If he had, he might have realized that God had sent His Son to be the eternal High Priest.

## **Three Chances at Heaven**

Joseph Smith was a man of revelation. Perhaps the most welcome revelations from young Joseph were his new teachings about salvation. The idea that all people would receive a measure of salvation was widely received by the Mormon Church.

As well, his teaching regarding the celestial kingdom found wide acceptance. According to Bruce R. McConkie, author of Mormon Doctrine, "Heaven is the celestial Kingdom of God." [\[17\]](#) LeGrand Richards, a presiding bishop of the Mormon Church, says that we have "at least five places to which we may go after death." [\[18\]](#) He says we "have three heavens, paradise, and the hell so often spoken of in the scriptures. . . ." [\[19\]](#) Joseph Smith taught that "in the celestial glory there are

three heavens or degrees.”{20} However, according to the Holy Bible, Joseph’s teaching about man’s disposition after death is anything but scriptural.

The revelation or “The Vision,” as it came to be known, is found in the Doctrine and Covenants and was given to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on February 16, 1832.{21} This revelation was given by Jesus {vs. 14} to those individuals who will be in the first resurrection of the Firstborn. The Firstborn are those who held the priesthood.

The Celestial Kingdom is made up of three levels or degrees of heaven. The first, or the lower level of heaven, is known as the telestial glory. This degree of heaven is held for those “who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus,”{22} but who, nevertheless, did not deny the Holy Spirit. The Telestial Kingdom is for those who chose wickedness over godliness.

The second degree of heaven is the terrestrial glory. This level is held for those “who, though honorable, failed to comply with the requirements for exaltation, were blinded by the craftiness of men and unable to receive and obey the higher laws of God.”{23} Likewise, it is for those who rejected Christ in mortal life but accepted Him afterwards.{24}

The third, or the highest level, of heaven is that of the celestial. This degree is held for those who have received the Temple ordinances. They have been married in the Temple for all time and eternity and they are gods.{25} According to James E. Talmage, they “have striven to obey all the divine commandments,. . .have accepted the testimony of Christ, obeyed ‘the laws and ordinances of the Gospel,’ and received the Holy Spirit.”{26} Therefore, they are entitled to the highest glory.

The remaining options for the individual who does not qualify

for the celestial glories are paradise and perdition, for the Latter-day Saints do not believe in a hell. Joseph Smith put it this way: "There is no hell. All will find a measure of salvation."[\[27\]](#)

At death the individual's spirit goes either to paradise to later be judged and offered one of the three degrees of heaven, or his spirit is sent to perdition where it is given a chance to repent and thus gain a higher heavenly option.

Perdition, commonly known as Spirit-Prison Hell, is a temporary state even though it lasts more than a thousand years. It is interesting to note that the Book of Mormon does not seem to agree with the Doctrine and Covenants where it clearly states there is no second chance for repentance after death. Alma 34:32 states,

*"For behold this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God...Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end...if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked."*[\[28\]](#)

Once again it becomes evident that Joseph Smith changed his mind regarding another key revelation, since the teaching of the Bible does not correspond to the changeableness of the Mormon prophet. We must conclude that Mormonism completely lacks of any biblical basis and is truly another gospel.

## **Celestial Marriage: Fact or Fiction?**

Eternal Marriage is essential for exaltation. A key element of Mormon doctrine and the foundation for exaltation in the highest heaven is celestial marriage. Exaltation is the primary goal for each Mormon to achieve. To understand the



Latter-Day Saints' desire to enter into an eternal marriage it is important to understand the term "exaltation."

Exaltation, according to an official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints publication, "is eternal life, the kind of life that God lives. He lives in great glory. He is perfect. He possesses all knowledge and all wisdom. He is the father of spirit children. He is a creator. We can become gods like our Heavenly Father. This is exaltation."[{29}](#)

We find in the Book of Moses in Mormon scriptures God saying, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."[{30}](#)—in other words, to help man and woman become gods and goddesses in the celestial kingdom.

"An eternal marriage must be performed by one who holds the sealing powers and authority"[{31}](#)—one who holds the priesthood authority. The marriage "must also be done in the proper place. The proper place is in one of the holy temples of our Lord. The temple is the only place this holy ordinance can be performed."[{32}](#) Mormons believe that if they are married by any other authority the marriage is for this life only and therefore negates their opportunity for celestial exaltation.

William Clayton, Hyrum Smith's clerk, was present when Joseph Smith first announced the revelation regarding plural and celestial marriage. Clayton wrote that from Joseph he "learned that the doctrine of plural and celestial marriage is the most holy and important doctrine ever revealed to man on earth, and that without obedience to that principle no man can ever attain to the fullness of exaltation in celestial glory."[{33}](#)

This revelation was first given publicly at Nauvoo, Illinois, July 12, 1843. In May of that year Joseph revealed that "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; and if he does not, he cannot obtain it."[{34}](#)

Joseph goes on to reveal that “if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned.”{35}

It has already been pointed out that the individual will receive a measure of salvation regardless of his disposition. The recurring question that remains is, Why should I subject myself to the regimen of the church (ie. the hassles) if I will receive salvation anyway? We find the answer further in the revelation. “We must be obedient to every covenant that we make in the temple of the Lord. He (God) has said that if we are true and faithful we shall pass by the angels to our exaltation. We will become gods.”{36} The Mormon hopes to become a god himself but only if he is in complete compliance with the church.

It is noteworthy that the teaching that reveals the foundation for celestial marriage {exaltation} is not to be found in the Book of Mormon, the “most correct” of any book on earth.{37} Therefore, it seems that the motivation for entering into celestial marriage is not based on fact but on the possibility of being a god or a goddess.

The teachings of the Mormon church often go unchallenged and many in the church, along with a growing number outside its doors believe it to be a Christian institution. Those in the church have in many cases been “fellowshipped”; that is, they have been catered to for the specific reason of gaining their membership in the church. Often these members have not clearly discerned the doctrine of the church.

Those outside the Mormon Church see the good works of its members and because of their lack of understanding of Christian teaching and their acute lack of knowledge regarding Mormon sources, they tend to think that the Mormon church is as Christian as the Baptists, Methodists and the Presbyterians.

Brigham Young, second President of the Mormon Church,

challenged the world to test the teachings of the Latter-Day Saints. This essay is an answer to his challenge.

## Notes

1. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), 98.
2. Ibid., 98-99.
3. Orson Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Liverpool, 1851), 1-2.
4. Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 29:10 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982).
5. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 194. See also, *The History of the Church* (Vol. 4, November 28, 1841), 461.
6. Letter from the Smithsonian Institution (SIL-76, Summer 1979).
7. *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 1, p. 188.
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10. *The History of the Church*, Vol. 2 (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 2nd ed. revised, 1976), 182.
11. *The Book of Mormon*, 1 Nephi 13:26.
12. Joseph Smith, *Pearl of Great Price* 2:68-73 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968).
13. "The Example of Abraham," *Ensign* (June 1975):3. See also *Gospel Principles*, First Quorum of the Seventy, (1986), 103.
14. "Priesthood Authority and Power," *Ensign* (May 1976), 33.
15. David Witmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 64.
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17. McConkie, 348.
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22. Ibid., 76:82.
23. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 92.
24. Doctrine and Covenants, 76:73-74.
25. Doctrines and Covenants, 76:58.
26. Talmage, 91.
27. John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith: Seeker After Truth, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, 1951) 177-78.
28. Book of Mormon, Alma 34:32.
29. *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, revised 1986), 289.
30. Ibid., 290. The Doctrine and Covenants, Moses 1:39.
31. *Gospel Principles*, 233.
32. Ibid.
33. Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1977), 345.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-3.
35. Ibid., 132:4.
36. *Gospel Principles*, 234. See also Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20 and the Mormon publication by Oscar W. McConkie, Jr., *God and Man* (The Corporation of the Presiding Bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1963), 5.
37. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 194.

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## Big Data

*“Big Data” describes the sea of digital facts, figures, products, books, music, video, and much more that we live in. Kerby Anderson calls for a biblical response of discernment*

*and integrity.*

We live in the world of “Big Data.” That is the new way people are trying to describe this sea of digital facts, figures, products, books, music, video, and much more. All of this is at our fingertips through computers and smartphones. And there is a lot of data. Eric Schmidt, executive chairman for Google, estimates that humans now create in two days the same amount of data that it took from the dawn of civilization until 2003 to create. No wonder people say we live in the world of “Big Data.”

This remarkable change in our world has happened quickly and seamlessly. Today we take for granted that we can create data and access data instantaneously. Pick up the book *The Human Face of Big Data* and look at the pictures and stories that describe the powerful impact the tsunami of data is having on our lives and our world.[\[1\]](#) Look at how this vast amount of data is being used by individuals, universities, and companies to answer questions, pull together information, and persuade us to purchase various goods and services.



One article in *USA Today* explains how “Big Data” will transform our lives and lifestyles.[\[2\]](#) Retailers can target you with online purchasing appeals because of the data they already collect from you when you are online. They can suggest books, videos, and various products you would be interested in based upon previous searches or purchases.

If you have a smartphone, think of how you already depend upon it in ways that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. It can help answer a question someone poses. It can direct you to a place to eat. If you need gas for your car, it can tell you where the closest gas station is located.

“Big Data” also provides power through instant access to information. Juan Enriquez, author of *As the Future Catches*

You, writes that “today a street stall in Mumbai can access more information, maps, statistics, academic papers, price trends, futures markets and data than a U.S. president could only a few decades ago.”[\[3\]](#)

Welcome to the world of “Big Data.” We have more information at our fingertips than any generation in history. As you will see, Christians need to be thinking about this change in our world. We as individuals and as a society must consider how to use all of this accumulated information wisely.

## **An Ocean of Data**

Nearly a century ago, a dystopian novel imagined a world where every building was made of glass so that various authorities could monitor what citizens are doing every minute of the day. Dan Gardner suggests that the world of Big Data already makes that possible.[\[4\]](#)

The term Big Data describes the continuous accumulation and analysis of information. There is a reason people are calling it Big Data. I noted earlier that humans now create in two days the same amount of data that it took from the dawn of civilization until 2003 to create. Some predict that we will now be creating that same amount every few hours.

Dan Gardner says we are awash in an ocean of information. “Every time someone clicks on something at Amazon, it’s recorded and another drop is added to the ocean. . . . Every time a customs officer checks a passport, every time someone posts to Facebook, every time someone does a Google search—the ocean swells.”

Anyone who has access to that data can begin to use powerful computer algorithms to sift through texts, purchases, posts, photos, and videos to extract more data and trends. Gardner says it will be able to extract meaning and “sort through masses of numbers and find the hidden pattern, the unexpected

correlation, the surprising connection. That ability is growing at astonishing speed.”

We actually welcome some aspect of Big Data. When I buy a book online from Amazon, it recommends other books I might want to know about and purchase. When I buy a book at Barnes and Noble, the register receipt instantaneously prints out a list of other books similar to the one I just purchased.

This ocean of Big Data is also intrusive. The government knows more about you than you might want them to know. The Internal Revenue Service is collecting more than your taxes these days. They are collecting a massive amount of personal information on your digital activities: credit card payments, e-pay transactions, eBay auctions, and Facebook posts.

Why is the Internal Revenue Service using Big Data to invade your privacy? Government leaders are putting pressure on the IRS because the federal government needs more money, and it is estimated that as much as \$300 billion in revenue is lost to evasion and errors each year. Collecting and analyzing this data might be one way to close the so-called “tax gap.”

The amount of data the government and private industry collects on us each day is overwhelming. Like the fictional novel, we seem live in a world where all the buildings are made of glass.

## **Keeping Up With the Data**

Juan Enriquez believes that we are going to have trouble keeping up with all the data coming our way. He explains the data explosion in his essay, “Reflection in a Digital Mirror.”<sup>{5}</sup> He says, “Most modern humans are now attempting to cram more data into their heads in a single day than most of our ancestors did during entire lifetimes.” He goes on to say that in the time it takes to read his essay, “the amount of information generated by the human race will have expanded by

about 20 petabytes.” That is equivalent to about three times the amount of information currently in the Library of Congress.

We are trying to keep up. He estimates that we “try to cram in, read, understand, and remember at least 5 percent more words than the year before.” That essentially means that five years ago we were trying to cope with 100,000 words per day. Now we are trying to cope with 130,000 words per day.

Who can keep up? Two years ago, a global marketing intelligence firm estimated that “we played, swam, wallowed, and drowned in 1.8 zettabytes of data.” To put that in perspective, the firm used this illustration. Imagine you wanted to store this data on 32-gigabyte iPads. You would need 86 billion devices, just enough to erect a 90-foot-high wall 4,000 miles long.[\[6\]](#)

The good news is that we don’t have to collect, catalog, and analyze all the data. Computers with powerful algorithms can do much of it. We will benefit greatly from this tsunami of data. We will go from sampling the available data to having a collection of enormous data sets. We will know the world around us in unprecedented ways.

The explosion of digital data is also unprecedented. Juan Enriquez estimates that in 1986, only 6 percent of the world’s data was digital. The world wide web was still three years away. There was no Google or any of the services that we take for granted today. Now more than 99 percent of the world’s written words, images, music, and data are in digital form.

On the one hand, we are drowning in a sea of data. On the other hand, we have access to this data because we live in a digital world. The real question we will have to ask in the 21st century is what to do with all this data.

We will need discernment. Proverbs 3:21 admonishes us to “preserve sound judgment and discernment.” Proverbs 15:14



reminds us that a “discerning heart seeks knowledge.” Paul prayed that believers would “be able to discern what is best” (Philippians 1:9-11). We will need discernment in this age of Big Data.

## Dark Data

We live in a world filled with digital facts, figures, books, music, and video. Most of it is at our fingertips, and that is a good thing. But there is also the great concern over what could be called “Dark Data.”

Marc Goodman has written about “Dark Data,” and he is concerned.[\[7\]](#) He has worked on security issues in more than 70 countries and sees the possibilities for criminals in our digital world.

He reminds us that criminals and terrorists have found ways to use these new devices and innovations. Sadly, we often underestimate their creativity and can easily be a step behind those who intend us harm. Sometimes they have better access to information than law enforcement and Homeland Security.

Drug-runners in Mexico not only have the latest smartphones but have actually been building their own encrypted radio networks in their country. Drug cartels in Columbia are using their vast wealth from drugs “to fund research and development programs in everything from robotics to supply chain management.”

During the terrorist attack in Mumbai five years ago, the terrorists were armed not only “with the standard artillery and explosives, but also with satellite phones, Blackberrys, night vision goggles, and satellite imagery.” If that is what terrorists had access to years ago, it is reasonable to assume that the next terrorist attack will come from terrorists using even more sophisticated technology.

One of greatest innovations for the terrorists is their open-source intelligence center, which they developed across the border in Pakistan. They were able to monitor the Internet and social media to determine the progress of their terrorist attacks. They had a real-time open-source feedback loop that gave terrorists situational awareness and tactical advantages.

One final concern about dark data is the ability to affect many more people with a crime or terrorist attack. Access to all of this data gives the bad guys an advantage unavailable to criminals in the past. Jesse James could rob a train. Bonnie and Clyde could rob a bank. A few dozens or a few hundreds would feel their impact. Today hackers can steal information from millions of people. Cybercrimes can ruin the lives of many more people, and cybercriminals may even be harder to catch.

These new technological advances and the incredible amount of data will no doubt make our world a better place. But we should also realize that criminals and terrorists will also be there to exploit it. We need to train those in law enforcement and counterterrorism in the latest technology so they can keep us safe.

## **Big Data and Surveillance**

The TV program begins with these words: “You are being watched. The government has a secret system: a machine that spies on you every hour of every day. I know because I built it. I designed the machine to detect acts of terror, but it sees everything.”

The program I am talking about is the CBS series *Person of Interest*. The creator of the program, Jonathan Nolan, hit a cultural nerve about our increasing lack of privacy. In her article about the program, Susan Karlin reminds us that the storyline is fiction but based upon real-life source material

that Jonathan Nolan cited in his interview with her.[\[8\]](#) He got some of his ideas from books like *The Watchers: The Rise of America's Surveillance State* and from the government's defunct Total Information Awareness Office.

This isn't the first time Jonathan Nolan has raised the question of surveillance in the scripts he has written. When he co-wrote the script for the movie *The Dark Knight*, he inserted a scene where Batman turns all of the Gotham City cell phones into tracking devices so he can find the location of The Joker.

According to Susan Karlin, "Nolan got a taste of encroaching surveillance while growing up in the North London neighborhood of Highgate. 'Scotland Yard began putting cameras up everywhere,' he recalls of a time long before local phone hacking scandals erupted. 'There were cameras out on street corners; English police employed cameras. When I moved to the States at 12, there weren't any cameras. Now you're seeing some cities catching up. In Manhattan, they counted 5,000 in 2005. In 2010, the number was uncountable.'" When you add all the cell phone cameras in the population to these other cameras, you can easily see we have lost our privacy.

The popularity of the television program is no doubt due to many factors, in addition to concerns about privacy and surveillance. Whatever the reasons, it has struck a nerve and caused us to once again think about Big Brother.

This topic also reminds us that we must live our lives above reproach. Philippians 2:14-15 says "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." 1 Timothy 3:2 says that an elder must be "above reproach," which is an attribute that should describe all of us. Live a life of integrity and you won't have to be so concerned about what may be made public in

age where we are losing our privacy.

## Notes

1. *The Human Face of Big Data*, Against All Odds Productions, 2012.
2. Chuck Raasch, "Big data transforms our lives and lifestyles, *USA Today*, 13 December 2012.
3. Juan Enriquez, *As the Future Catches You*, Crown Business, 2005.
4. "Big Data could know us better than we know ourselves," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 27, 2012.
5. *Human Face of Big Data*, 18-21.
6. Ibid., 19.
7. Ibid., 74-77.
8. Karlin, Susan, "'Person Of Interest' Creator Jonathan Nolan Isn't Paranoid—Or Is He?" *Fast Company*, 21 September 2011.

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# The Pagan Connection: Did Christianity Borrow from the Mystery Religions?

*Dr. Pat Zukeran examines the myths from mystery religions which are sometimes argued to be the source of our Gospel accounts of Jesus. He finds that any such connection is*

*extremely weak and does not detract from the reliability of the gospel message.*

One of the popular ideas being promoted today especially on the internet is the idea that the miracle stories of Jesus were borrowed from ancient pagan myths. Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy write in their book *The Laughing Jesus*, "Each mystery religion taught its own version of the myth of the dying and resurrecting Godman, who was known by different names in different places. In Egypt, where the mysteries began, he was Osiris. In Greece he became Dionysus, in Asia Minor he is known as Attis, in Syria he is Adonis, in Persia he is Mithras, in Alexandria he is Serapis, to name a few."[\[1\]](#)

Proponents of this idea point out that there are several parallels between these pagan myths and the story of Jesus Christ. Parallels including a virgin birth, a divine Son of God, the god dying for mankind, resurrection from the dead, and others are cited. Skeptics allege that Christianity did not present any unique teaching, but borrowed the majority of its tenets from the mystery religions.



Indeed, some of the alleged parallels appear to be quite striking. One example is the god Mithras. This myth teaches that Mithras was born of a virgin in a cave, that he was a traveling teacher with twelve disciples, promised his disciples eternal life, and sacrificed himself for the world. The god Dionysius miraculously turns water into wine. The Egyptian god Osiris is killed and then resurrects from the dead.

This position was taught in the nineteenth century by the History of Religions School, but by the mid-twentieth century this view was shown to be false and it was abandoned even by those who believed Christianity was purely a natural religion.[\[2\]](#) Ron Nash wrote, "During a period of time running roughly from about 1890 to 1940, scholars often alleged that

primitive Christianity had been heavily influenced by Platonism, Stoicism, the pagan religions, or other movements in the Hellenistic world. Largely as a result of a series of scholarly books and articles written in rebuttal, allegations of early Christianity's dependence on its Hellenistic environment began to appear much less frequently in the publications of Bible scholars and classical scholars. Today most Bible scholars regard the question as a dead issue."[\[3\]](#)

Despite the fact that many of the arguments were rejected, this theory has once again emerged through the popular writings of skeptics.

What makes Christianity unique among the world religions is that it is a historical faith based on the historical person of Christ who lived a miraculous life. In what follows, we will examine Christianity to see if it teaches a unique Savior or if it is simply a copy of these pagan myths.

## Fallacies of the Theory

There are several flaws with the theory that Christianity isn't unique. New Testament scholars Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Dan Wallace point out several fallacies. The first is the *composite* fallacy. Proponents of this view lump together pagan religions as if they are one religion when making comparisons to Christianity. An attempt is made to show strong parallels by combining features from various religions.[\[4\]](#) However, when the individual myths themselves are studied, the reader soon finds major differences and very little commonality.

A second fallacy is a fallacy of *terminology*. Christian terms are used to describe pagan beliefs, and then it is concluded that there are parallel origins and meanings. Although the terms used are the same, however, there are big differences between Christian and pagan practices and definitions.[\[5\]](#)

A third fallacy is the *chronological* fallacy. Supporters of the theory incorrectly assume that Christianity borrowed many of its ideas from the mystery religions, but the evidence reveals it was actually the other way around. There is no archaeological evidence that mystery religions were in Palestine in the first century A.D. Jews and early Christians loathed syncretism with other religions. They were uncompromisingly monotheistic while Greeks were polytheistic. Christians also strongly defended the uniqueness of Christ (Acts 4:12). Although Christians encountered pagan religions, they opposed any adopting of foreign beliefs.{6} Ron Nash stated, "The uncompromising monotheism and the exclusiveness that the early church preached and practiced make the possibility of any pagan inroads . . . unlikely if not impossible." {7}

Fourth is the *intentional* fallacy. Christianity has a linear view of history. History is moving in a purposeful direction. There is a purpose for mankind's existence; history is moving in a direction to fulfill God's plan for the ages. The mystery religions have a cyclical view of history. History continues in a never ending cycle or repetition often linked with the vegetation cycle.{8}

Christianity gains its source from Judaism, not Greek mythology. Jesus, Paul, and the apostles appeal to the Old Testament, and you find direct teachings and fulfillments in the New Testament. Teachings such as one God, blood atonement for sin, salvation by grace, sinfulness of mankind, bodily resurrection, are sourced in Judaism and foreign to Greek mythology. The idea of resurrection was not taught in any Greek mythological work prior to the late second century A.D.{9}

## **Legends of the Mystery Religions**

As noted above, critics of Christianity point to several

parallels between Christianity and the myths of the mystery religions. However, a brief study of the legends reveals that there are few if any parallels to the life of Jesus Christ. Historians acknowledge that there are several variations to many of these myths and that they also evolved and changed under the influence of Roman culture and, later, Christianity. Historical research indicates that it was not until the third century A.D. that Christianity and the mystery religions came into real contact with one another.[{10}](#) A brief overview of some of the most popular myths reveals the lack of resemblance with Christianity.

In the matter of death and resurrection, major differences are seen between Christianity and pagan myths. First, none of the resurrections in these myths involve the God of the universe dying a voluntary death for His creation. Only Jesus died for sins; the death of other gods was due to hunting accidents, emasculation, and other calamities. The gods in these stories die by compulsion, not by choice, sometimes in bitterness and despair, never in self-giving love.[{11}](#)

Second, Jesus died once for all (Heb. 7:27, 9:25-28), while pagan gods repeat the death and rebirth cycle yearly with the seasons.

Third, Jesus' death was not a defeat but a triumph. The New Testament's mood of victory and joy (1 Cor. 15:50-57 and Col. 2:13-15) stands in contrast to the mood of pagan myths which is dark and sorrowful over the fate of their gods.

Finally, Jesus' death was an actual event in history. Christianity insists on and defends the historical credibility of the Gospel accounts while the pagan cults make no such attempt.[{12}](#)

A popular myth that some believe parallels the resurrection of Christ is the story of Osiris. The cult of the gods Osiris and his wife Isis originated in Egypt. According to the legend,



Osiris' wicked brother Set murdered him and sank his coffin to the bottom of the Nile. Isis recovered the coffin and returned it to Egypt. However, Set discovered the body, cut it into fourteen pieces, and threw the pieces into the Nile. Isis collected thirteen of the body parts and bandaged the body, making the first mummy. Osiris was transformed and became the ruler of the underworld, and exists in a state of semi-consciousness.

This legend hardly parallels the resurrection of Christ. Osiris is not resurrected from death to life. Instead he is changed into another form and lives in the underworld in a zombie state. Christ rose physically from the grave, conquering sin and death. The body that was on the cross was raised in glory.

## **Resurrection Parallels**

Two other popular myths compared to Christianity are those of Mithras and Attis.

There is a belief that the story of Mithras contains a death and resurrection. However, there is no teaching in early Mithraism of neither his death nor his resurrection. Ron Nash stated, "Mithraism had no concept of the death and resurrection of its god and no place for any concept of rebirth – at least during its early stages. . . . Moreover, Mithraism was basically a military cult. Therefore, one must be skeptical about suggestions that it appealed to nonmilitary people like the early Christians."[\[13\]](#)

Moreover, Mithraism flowered after Christianity, not before, so Christianity could not have copied from it. The timing is incorrect to have influenced the development of first-century Christianity. It is most likely the reverse: Christianity influenced Mithraism. Edwin Yamauchi, one of the foremost scholars on ancient Persia and Mithraism states, "The earnest

mithraea are dated to the early second century. There are a handful of inscriptions that date to the early second century, but the vast majority of texts are dated after A.D. 140. Most of what we have as evidence of Mithraism comes in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD. That's basically what's wrong with the theories about Mithraism influencing the beginnings of Christianity."[\[14\]](#)

The legend of Attis was popular in the Hellenistic world. According to this legend, Cybele, also known as the mother goddess, fell in love with a young Phrygian shepherd named Attis. However, he was unfaithful to her so she caused him to go mad. In his insanity, he castrated himself and died. Cybele mourned greatly (which caused death to enter into the world). She preserved Attis' dead body, allowing his hair to grow and little finger to move. In some versions, Attis returns to life in the form of an evergreen tree. However, there is no bodily resurrection to life. All versions teach that Attis remained dead. Any account of a resurrection of Attis does not appear till a hundred and fifty years after Christ.[\[15\]](#)

To sum up, the claim that Christianity adopted its resurrection account from the pagan mystery religions is false. There are very few parallels to the resurrection of Christ. The idea of a physical resurrection to glory is foreign to these religions, and the stories of dying a rising gods do not appear till well after Christianity.

## **Myths of a Virgin Birth**

Let us now look-at the alleged parallels between virgin births in the mystery religions and the virgin birth of Christ. Parallels quickly break down when the facts are analyzed. In the pagan myths, the gods lust after women, take on human form, and enter into physical relationships. Also, the offspring that are produced are half human and half divine beings in contrast to Christ who is fully human and fully

divine, the creator of the universe who existed from eternity past.

The alleged parallels to the virgin birth are found in the legends of Dionysus and Mithras. Dionysus is the god of wine. In this story, Zeus disguised as a man had relations with Semele and she became pregnant. In a jealous rage, Hera, Zeus' wife, attempted to burn Semele. Zeus rescued the fetus and sewed it into his thigh until the offspring, Dionysus, was born. The birth of Dionysus was the result of a sexual union of Zeus, in the form of a man, and Semele. This cannot be considered a virgin birth.

One of the popular cults of the later Roman Empire was the cult of Mithra which originated in Persia. Mithra was supposedly born when he emerged from a rock; he was carrying a knife and torch and wearing a Phrygian cap. He battled first with the sun and then with a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithra slew the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race.[{16}](#) The birth of Mithra from a rock, born fully grown, hardly parallels the virgin birth of Christ.

New Testament scholar. Raymond Brown states that alleged virgin parallels "consistently involve a type of *hieros gamos* where a divine male, in human or other form, impregnates a woman, either through normal sexual intercourse or through some substitute form of penetration. They are not really similar to non-sexual virginal conception that is at the core of the infancy narratives, a conception where there is no male deity or element to impregnate Mary."[{17}](#)

The Gospel of Luke teaches that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and through the power of the Most High she became pregnant. Mary had no physical relationship with a man or a deity who became a man.

Our study of the mystery religions reveals very few parallels

with Christianity. For this reason, the theory that Christianity copied its major tenets from the mystery religions should be rejected.

## Notes

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2. Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications: 2006), 221.
3. Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2007), 167.
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5. Ibid., 224-6.
6. Ibid., 231-234.
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9. Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, MO.: College Press Publishing, 1997), 34.
10. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, 129.
11. Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL :InterVarsity Press, 1984),53.
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13. Ibid., 144.
14. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 169.
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17. Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 182.

# Mormon Beliefs About the Bible and Salvation – Attacking Salvation through Christ's Grace

*Russ Wise helps us understand Mormon beliefs from a Christian worldview perspective. He looks at their core teachings on the Bible and salvation and demonstrates their inconsistency with the truths of Christianity. He concludes that Joseph Smith attempted to strip Jesus Christ of His fundamental gift to humanity—salvation through grace.*

## The Foundational Vision of Joseph Smith

Mormonism has become America's most successful home-grown religion. An Examines Mormon doctrine about the Bible, Mormon scriptures, and salvation. April 1987 news brief in the *Dallas Morning News* reveals a nine percent rise in the conversion rate to Mormonism. The Mormon church boasts a four million membership in the United States and 6.2 million members worldwide. In fact, the Mormon church is doubling in size every ten years. It took 117 years for the Mormon church to reach one million members and a short five years to add a fourth million to its membership.

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church in 1830, declared that he was chosen by God to restore true Christianity to human kind. Think about it, Christianity was lost after the death of the last disciple; and Joseph Smith, a young man fourteen years of age would be used by God to restore the lost truths of Christianity. The young prophet was not greeted by enthusiasm but received ridicule instead.

Brigham Young, the successor to Joseph Smith said this about

Mormonism: "I say to the whole world, receive the truth, no matter who presents it to you. Take up the Bible, compare the religion of the Latter-day Saints with it, and see if it will stand the test."[{1}](#)

According to Spencer W. Kimball, the past president of the church, the goal of the Mormon church is to bring light into the world and the charge to convert the people of the world to accept the truth. He stated: "This is what we want—the total membership of all the world as indicated by the Lord."[{2}](#) The Latter-day Saints are not only interested in converting the living to their truth but the dead as well.

In the mid 1820's a great revival broke out in the Methodist Church in upstate New York and quickly spread to the Baptist and Presbyterian churches. As a new convert, young Joseph was confused as to which church he should join. Because of his unrest he went into the woods to pray for God's guidance in the matter. It was there that he saw a vision that set a new course for his life and millions of others. However, this foundation block has been re-hewn over the years.

There are no less than nine versions of this one vision. There are three versions given by Joseph Smith himself. The first version was dictated by Joseph Smith in 1838 and published in 1842. It stated that he was fourteen years of age, that God and Jesus had appeared to him and told him that all churches were wrong.[{3}](#) Another version was dictated with portions in Joseph Smith's handwriting in 1831 or 1832. It stated that he was sixteen years of age, that Jesus had appeared and that by searching the Bible, he had found that all religions were wrong.

It's amazing to me, and I suppose you, too, that these accounts—as divergent as they are—could lend credibility to young Joseph's vision. If you were a witness of a crime and gave views as different as these, one would question your presence at the event.

Prophet David O. McKay says that: "The appearing of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith is the foundation of this church."[\[4\]](#) I find it ludicrous that so many would place their faith on such a shaky foundation. Jesus called Peter the rock and that on that rock he would build his church.

## Sources of Mormon Doctrine

The Book of Mormon is believed by Mormons to be the "fullness of the everlasting gospel."[\[5\]](#) If this is true, then why so many additions to it?

Mormon doctrine is primarily received by the Prophet of the church. The Prophet Ezra Taft Benson, spoke at Brigham Young University on February 26, 1980. During his remarks he gave the current teaching regarding the absolute authority of this high office. He stated: "Keep your eye on the President of the church. If he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it."

The Living Prophet is the first line of authority for the Mormons. The present Prophet can overturn any prior teaching of a past Prophet, including that of Joseph Smith. Brigham Young said that (paraphrased) when compared with the living Prophet, the Bible, the Book of Mormon and other standard works of the church are nothing to him. They do not convey the word of God as does the Prophet.

President Joseph Fielding Smith declared that at every General Conference of the church the speakers are giving forth scripture that is equal to anything in the Bible or the Book of Mormon.

To contrast the teaching of this evolutionary prophet, the Bible tells us that God is an unchanging God. Malachi 3:6 says: "For I the Lord do not change..." God's character does not change; He is the same yesterday, today and forever; nor does he change his mind."

The second source of authority for the Mormon is the Doctrine and Covenants and was written after the Book of Mormon. The Doctrine and Covenants contains revelations received by Joseph Smith after the publication of the Book of Mormon. For the Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants has authority over the Book of Mormon since it reveals “latter-day” truth. It’s interesting to note that there are a large number of contradictions between the two.

*The History of Joseph Smith*, another source of authority, states this regarding the Book of Mormon: “He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates. . . , he also said that the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the saviour to the ancient inhabitants.”[{6}](#)

Let me underscore the phrase “the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it.” If we can allow the English language to speak for itself, I think one would have to agree that what Joseph Smith is saying here is that the Book of Mormon is the full presentation of the everlasting gospel—that God has “said it all”—right here. If this is true, then the prophet has shot himself in the foot. Where, then, lies the authority for the Doctrine and Covenants and the other standard works of the Mormon church?

The Pearl of Great Price is made up of three books: The Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham and the writings of Joseph Smith.

The Book of Abraham is unique in that it was translated much the same way as the Book of Mormon. The Book of Abraham was translated from some ancient records from the catacombs of Egypt. Joseph Smith believed these records to be written by Abraham’s own hand and called it “The Book of Abraham.”

To shed light on the veracity of Joseph Smith’s translation, three well-known Egyptologists were allowed to give



independent translations of the papyri. Each one, independent of the other, came to the same astonishing conclusion. The Book of Abraham, as translated by Joseph Smith, was a farce. He had taken one proper name and translated it into some 85 words with eleven proper names. Joseph Smith did not get even one word correct in the whole translation. However, the manuscript was plagiarized from the Egyptian “Book of Breathings.”

It is hard to reach any other conclusion than that Joseph Smith’s explanations were products of his creative imagination. If, in fact, Joseph Smith’s credibility concerning these sources is faulty, then can we dare assume that the balance of his teaching represents the truth?

## **Why Mormons Reject the Bible**

Mormonism has become America’s most successful home-grown religion; but are they the only true church, as they believe?

The Mormons insist that they do not reject the Bible—in fact, you might have seen their missionaries use the Bible. However, they consider it only partially complete.

The *Church News*, a Mormon newspaper, carried this statement concerning the Bible: “It is the Word of God. It is not perfect. The prophet Joseph made many corrections in it.”[\[7\]](#)

The Book of Mormon echoes this idea in First Nephi 13:26: “... a great and abominable church which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the lamb many parts which are plain and most precious...”

To better understand the Mormon disregard for the Bible, we need to be aware of how they view the Christian church. The apostle Orson Pratt, in his book *The Seer* says this about the Christian community: “Both Catholics and Protestants are nothing less than the ‘whore of Babylon’ whom the Lord

denounces by the mouth of John the Revelator as having corrupted all the earth by their fornications and wickedness.”{8}

The Mormon church views the Christian pastor or priest as a hireling of Satan. But where did Joseph Smith get this idea?

Shortly after the religious awakening in upstate New York, Joseph Smith had a vision. In the vision he asked God which Christian church he should join. Joseph Smith writes in The Pearl of Great Price: “I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight.”{9}

I believe that one could safely say that Joseph Smith considered the Christian church to be a false church. Because of this basic premise, the logical conclusion would be, if the church is false, then the source of its doctrine—the Bible—must be false as well. Therefore, one can better understand the motivation behind the eighth article of faith of the Mormon church: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.”

Joseph Smith has, in effect, set the stage whereby he can rewrite the Bible,{10} or add to it, to establish his personal theology. The Mormon church believes that Joseph Smith is God’s instrument to bring about His truth, in its entire fullness.

Whenever this attitude toward Christianity and the Bible prevails, the individual is drawn away from the Bible and to the writings of Joseph Smith and the Mormon church. Orson Pratt said: “No one can tell whether even one verse of either the Old or New Testament conveys the ideas of the original author.”

An attempt at credibility is given the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith in Volume Four of the History of the Church where

he says; "I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."[{11}](#)

In essence, Joseph Smith has attempted to strip the Bible of its authority and place that authority upon the Book of Mormon and the standard works of the Mormon church.

The Bible speaks for itself. We find in scripture that God's word will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8), that it will never pass away even though heaven and earth will someday pass away (Matthew 24:35).

According to 2 Timothy 3:16, the Bible is inspired by God; and 2 Peter 1:20 indicates that all scripture was written by men moved by the Holy Spirit.

God's word has withstood critics, skeptics, and others who have sought to destroy it.

## Mormon Doctrine

"As man is, God once was. As God is, man can become." Is it possible that we, too, can become like God, that we can *become* God?

A chief source of doctrine for the Mormon church has been the book titled *Mormon Doctrine*[{12}](#) by the late Bruce R. McConkie. However, there are those who strongly disagree with him. The problem is simply this: McConkie contended that the true source of authority for the church is the standard works which include The Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

The presidents of the church, however, have attempted to establish *themselves* as the final authority of the church on doctrinal matters. McConkie gives us a glimpse of the primary teachings of the church. First is the belief that, "As man is,

God once was. As God is, man can become.”{13} The Mormon church teaches that God was once a man and that he progressed to godhood.{14} So for the Mormon, the good news is that you too can become as God. In contrast, the Bible clearly teaches that God has been God from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2).

Another belief is that individuals have to learn how to become gods themselves.{15} The road to godhood is paved with good works, and the responsibility is squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

Another belief that has received much attention is that godhood is not for men only, but for men and women together. This doctrine has spawned the teaching that God originally intended for man and woman to be joined together throughout all eternity—that the marriage covenant was to extend beyond death. The Mormon church further teaches that the practice of marrying “until death do you part” did not originate with the Lord or his servants, but is a man made doctrine.{16} This system of holy matrimony, involving covenants as to time and eternity, is known distinctively as “celestial marriage”—the order of marriage that exists in the celestial worlds.

The apostle James E. Talmage, in his book *The Articles of Faith*, says this about those who may aspire to such a marriage: “The ordinance of celestial marriage is permitted to those members of the church only who are adjudged worthy of participation in the special blessings of the House of the Lord...”{17} The use of the word “worthy” is another indication of the works orientation of the Mormon Church.

The Bible plainly teaches in Matthew 22:30 that in the resurrection men and women are no longer given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

The fourth doctrine we will look at is: God is a resurrected man. This doctrine puts forth the idea once again that God was

once a man who discovered his personal godhood and elevated himself to become a god.

Joseph Smith says: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's." [\[18\]](#) But he contradicts himself in the Book of Mormon; in Alma 31:15 he writes: "Holy, holy God; we believe that thou art God, we believe...that thou wast a spirit, and that thou art a spirit, and that thou wilt be a spirit forever." At this point Joseph is agreeing with the Bible, for we find in John 4 that "God is a spirit."

The problem of inconsistency arises for the Mormon church, when Joseph Smith contradicts himself between the Book of Mormon and the other standard works of the church—inconsistencies which point to the man-made nature of the religion. On the other hand, the Holy Bible is unique in that it has incredible unity in its message, even though it was written over a span of sixteen hundred years.

Josh McDowell, a defender of the Bible, writes: "Biblical authors wrote on hundreds of controversial subjects with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation. There is one unfolding story: 'God's redemption of man.'" [\[19\]](#)

## **The Mormon Plan of Salvation**

The Mormon church teaches that it is the only hope for salvation. If this is true, then why did Jesus suffer on the cross?

For many in this world, salvation is truly a slippery slope. Oftentimes the problem is that one does not really know if he possesses it or not. One of the greatest barriers to realizing our position in Christ is that we do not have a clear understanding of the gospel. To understand the Mormon church's teaching regarding salvation we must first realize what it believes the gospel to be.

By definition the Mormon church teaches that the gospel is the

Mormon church system and its doctrine.{20} The church and its doctrine becomes the good news—their gospel.

For the Christian it's not an organization but a Person who represents the gospel, and that Person is God's only begotten son, Jesus Christ. It is the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ that embodies the gospel for the true Christian. Jesus is man's savior. The Bible tells us that *JESUS* is the only way to God the Father.{21}

By contrast, Brigham Young says: "No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial Kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph. . . ." "He reigns there as supreme a being in his sphere, capacity, and calling as God does in heaven." {22} So for the Mormon, Joseph Smith has become the savior.

Volume One of Doctrines of Salvation says this about Joseph Smith: "No salvation without accepting Joseph Smith. If Joseph Smith was verily a prophet, and if he told the truth...then this knowledge is of the most vital importance to the entire world. No man can reject that testimony without incurring the most dreadful consequences, for he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." {23}

The Mormon church teaches that all men will receive a degree of salvation and that there is no place known as hell.{24} By incorporating this doctrine into the church, they have attempted to undercut the explicit teachings of the Bible. Furthermore, the church teaches that it *ALONE* is the only hope for salvation. Bruce McConkie, the Mormon scholar, says this regarding salvation: "If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation. There is no salvation outside of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." {25}

Many Mormons who may no longer fully believe the church's teachings find themselves in a dilemma. They have been so

persuaded that only the Mormon church offers a hope for salvation that they lose all hope for ever obtaining it. To better understand this instruction, we need to recognize the twofold approach to salvation taught in the Mormon church.

First, is general salvation. Grace comes to the Mormon by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and there is no need for obedience to the Mormon church and its doctrine or gospel law. However, to obtain individual salvation one must meet the conditions set by the church.[{26}](#) For the Mormon, this salvation, called “eternal life,” means godhood.

For the most part, the Mormon has never clearly understood the gospel of Jesus Christ because his church has so distorted Christian teaching. The outcome of this distortion is that Joseph Smith has stripped Jesus of His gift to mankind and he, Joseph, has taken the rightful place of our Lord and Savior. The Bible simply teaches that man must humble himself and receive the work Jesus did for him at the cross. Romans 10:9 put it this way: “...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

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4. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, An Improvement Era Publication, 1953), 85.
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# Gay Agenda in Schools – A Christian Worldview Perspective

*Kerby Anderson summarizes the efforts currently underway to implement a gay agenda in our public schools, identifying some of the negative consequences. Looking at this initiative from a biblical worldview perspective, he suggests actions that Christians should take in response to these actions.*

## Advancing the Gay Agenda in Schools

Since the early 1990s gay activists and various homosexual groups have been using strategies that provide them with greater access to public schools. Usually the focus is upon making the schools a safer place for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual students, thereby justifying the introduction of topics and speakers on the subject of homosexuality. And the establishment of homosexual clubs on campus provides an ongoing program to continue to introduce homosexuality to students on campus.

Two key organizations are the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). Both have been helpful in establishing a foothold for homosexual speakers, programs, and curricula.



Perhaps the most effective wedge used by gay activists to open the door to the public schools has been concern over student safety. Kevin Jennings, Executive Director for GLSEN, explained in a speech how the “safety” issue was a most effective strategy:

*In Massachusetts, the effective reframing of this issue was the key to the success of the Governor’s Commission on Gay*

*and Lesbian Youth. We immediately seized upon the opponent's calling card—safety—and explained how homophobia represents a threat to students' safety by creating a climate where violence, name-calling, health problems, and suicide are common. Titling our report "Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth," we automatically threw our opponents onto the defensive and stole their best line of attack. This framing short-circuited their arguments and left them back-pedaling from day one.*[\[1\]](#)

The strategy has obviously been successful because no one would want to be against making the schools a safer environment. It almost doesn't matter whether the allegations are true. Once you raise the concern of safety, most administrators, teachers, and parents quickly fall in line.

There is an irony in all of this. Many of the behaviors that are taught and affirmed in these school programs and clubs are unsafe in term of public health. For example, *Pediatrics* (Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics) reported on a Harvard study that found more than thirty risks positively associated with self-reported gay-lesbian-bisexual (GLB) orientation.[\[2\]](#) So it is indeed ironic that the idea of "safety" is often used as means to introduce teaching and discussion of behaviors that have been proven to be quite "unsafe."

## **The Goals of GLSEN**

The mission statement of GLSEN is straightforward: "The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression."[\[3\]](#) It is a growing, well-funded homosexual organization that promotes homosexual identity and behavior on campus. It has been very successful in gaining

access on campus by working with such influential groups as the National Education Association.

Anyone who takes the time to read some of the materials recommended by GLSEN will quickly find that it condones sexual themes and information that would be disturbing to most parents. One researcher who has taken the time to review these materials and investigate various school programs came to the following seven conclusions:[{4}](#)

1. GLSEN believes the early sexualization of children can be beneficial. This means that virtually any sexual activity as well as exposure to graphic sexual images and material, is not just permissible but good for children, as part of the process of discovering their sexuality.

2. “Coming out” (calling oneself or believing oneself to be homosexual) and even beginning homosexual sex practices at a young age, is a normal and positive experience for youth which should be encouraged by teachers and parents, according to GLSEN.

3. Bisexuality, “fluid” sexuality and sexual experimentation is encouraged by GLSEN as a right for all students.

4. Meeting other “gay” and “questioning” youth, sometimes without parental knowledge, is a frequent theme in GLSEN materials. At these meetings, minors will come into contact with college-age people and adults practicing homosexuality.

5. In GLSEN material, the “cool” adults—parents, teachers and counselors—are those who encourage students to embrace homosexuality and cross-dressing. They also allow adult-level freedoms and let children associate with questionable teens or adults.

6. GLSEN resources contain many hostile, one-sided anti-Christian vignettes and opinions, as well as false information about Christianity and the Bible’s position on homosexuality.

This encourages antagonism against biblical morality and increases the risk that youth will experiment with high-risk behavior.

7. The spirituality presented positively in GLSEN resources is heavily laced with occult themes and nightmarish images.

## Goals of PFLAG and Gay Clubs

PFLAG is a national organization of parents, families, and friends that “promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.”[\[5\]](#) It has been an active organization at the local level to promote its views of human sexuality into schools, churches, and various youth organizations. Although there is a strong emphasis on rights and tolerance, their message about sexuality would be disturbing to most parents.

One researcher who has taken the time to review their brochures and other materials came to the following five conclusions:[\[6\]](#)

1. PFLAG believes in total sexual license for people of all ages. For children, this means that virtually any sexual activity, as well as exposure to graphic sexual images and material, is not just permissible but good for children as part of the process of discovering their sexuality.

2. “Coming out” (calling oneself homosexual or cross-dressing) at a very young age, and even beginning early homosexual sex practices, is a desirable goal in the world according to PFLAG.

3. Bisexuality, fluid sexuality, and sexual experimentation is encouraged by PFLAG. The group believes it’s important for all students to learn about these options.

4. Meeting with other “gay” and “questioning” youth, usually

without parental knowledge, is a frequent theme in PFLAG materials. At these community meetings, thirteen-year-olds will come into contact with college-age youth and adults practicing homosexuality.

5. PFLAG spreads false information about the Bible, religious faith, and restoration of heterosexuality through faith. This misinformation closes the door of change for many young people, and stirs up anti-Christian and anti-Jewish bias and hostility.

Another way the gay agenda is promoted in the public schools is through Gay-Straight Alliance clubs. In the mid-1990s, there were a few dozen Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in U.S. high schools. Today there are 3,200 GSA clubs registered.[\[7\]](#)

These student-run clubs provides a meeting place for student talk about homosexuality and homosexual behaviors. It is also provides a platform for outside speakers to address various topics and for students to organize a “Pride Week” on campus. Once a year, many of the students in these clubs also participate in “The Day of Silence.” This is a day when students will remain silent all day as a way of acknowledging the silence induced by those who oppose homosexuality.

## **Legal Liability**

Is there any legal liability when schools permit and even promote the teaching of homosexual education the campus? One group (Citizens for Community Values) believes there is a potential liability. The group has published a manual documenting the potential liability that schools, administrators, and teachers might face. The following is a brief summary of much more information that can be found in the document “The Legal Liability Associated with Homosexual Education in Public Schools.”[\[8\]](#)

**Life expectancy**—The *International Journal of Epidemiology* found that gay and bisexual men involved in homosexual behavior cut off years from their lives. One study showed that “life expectancy at age 20 years for gay and bisexual men is 8 to 20 years less than for all men.” They therefore concluded that if “the same pattern of mortality were to continue, we estimate that nearly half of gay and bisexual men currently aged 20 years will not reach their 65th birthday.”[\[9\]](#)

**Sexually transmitted diseases**—The danger of various STDs, including HIV infection in homosexual relationships, has been well documented through many studies. The Medical Institute for Sexual Health says that “Homosexual men are at significantly increased risk of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, anal cancer, gonorrhea and gastrointestinal infections as a result of their sexual practices. Women who have sex with women are at significantly increased risk of bacterial vaginosis, breast cancer and ovarian cancer than are heterosexual women.”[\[10\]](#)

**Other health risk behaviors**—A study by Harvard University of over four thousand ninth- to twelfth-grade students found that gay-lesbian-bisexual “youth report disproportionate risk for a variety of health risk and problem behaviors” and they found that they “engage in twice the mean number of risk behaviors as did the overall population.”[\[11\]](#)

**Mental health**—A study published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* found those engaging in homosexual behavior have a much higher incidence of mental health problems. “The findings support the assumption that people with same-sex sexual behavior are at greater risk for psychiatric disorders.”[\[12\]](#)

Permitting and promoting homosexual activity through on-campus programs and clubs will certainly increase homosexual behavior among students. Administrators, teachers, and parents should reconsider the impact these programs, and the subsequent behavior, will have on the student body.

# Biblical Response

When we talk about the issue of homosexuality, it is important to keep two biblical principles in tension. On the one hand we must stay true to our biblical convictions, and on the other hand we should reach out with biblical compassion. Essentially this is the balance between truth and love.

On the one hand, it is crucial for us to understand how the homosexual agenda threatens to normalize and even promote homosexuality within the schools. Moreover, gay activists are pushing an agenda in the courts, the legislature, the schools, and the court of public opinion that will ultimately threaten biblical authority and many of our personal and religious freedoms. Christians, therefore, must stand for truth.

I have provided a brief overview of the groups and programs that are promoting the gay agenda in the public schools. I encourage you to find out what is happening in your community. We have also documented the potential legal liability associated with many of the behaviors that are encouraged by these programs. Often administrators and teachers are unaware of the potential dangers associated with homosexual education in the schools. Take time to share this information with them.

On the other hand, it is also important for us to reach out to those caught in the midst of homosexuality and offer God's grace and redemption. We cannot let the hardened rhetoric of gay activists keep us from having Christ's heart toward homosexuals. As individuals and as the church, we should reach out to those caught in the sin of homosexuality and offer them hope and point them to Jesus Christ so that they will find freedom from the sexual sin that binds their lives.

It is important to remember that many in the homosexual lifestyle are there because of some emotional brokenness in their families. They may be trying to meet their emotional needs in ungodly ways. Youth in the public schools may be

experimenting sexually and find themselves caught up in the homosexual lifestyle.

It is also important to remember that [change is possible](#). The testimony of hundreds of former homosexuals is proof that someone can change their sexual behavior. So are the various [studies](#) that document these same behavioral changes. And, most importantly, the Bible teaches that change is possible. Paul, writing to former homosexuals in the Corinthian church, noted that "such were some of you" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

In addressing the issue of the gay agenda in public schools, it is crucial to stay true to our biblical convictions (and stand for truth) while we also reach out with biblical compassion.

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# The World of Animism – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

*The belief in spirits and their effect on our world appears in just about every culture. Christianity should replace this anti-Christian worldview, but instead many Christians just incorporate it into their own belief system. Dr. Pat Zukeran contrasts these two belief systems.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## Worldview of Animism

From Genesis to the present, the biblical worldview has clashed with the worldview of animism. Animism (or folk religion) is a religion that sees a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

In most parts of the world, animism blends in with formal

religions. Among followers of the major religions lie many animistic beliefs and practices. Animistic beliefs actually dominate the world. Most Taiwanese believe in the Chinese folk religions. Most Hindus and Muslims in Central and Southeast Asia, and most Buddhists in China and Japan combine their religion with various animistic beliefs and practices. In many parts of the world, Christianity has not displaced the local folk religion but coexists beside it in an uneasy tension.

The animistic worldview contains both the observed or physical world and the unseen or spirit world. There is no sharp distinction between the two realities; what happens in one affects the other. The seen or physical world consists of what we can see, feel, and experience. It includes forces of nature and physical beings. In the seen world the earth plays a prominent role because it is viewed as a living entity and is often worshiped as Mother Earth. Nature is believed to be alive. Hills, caves, mountains, and lakes are often revered as sacred places. Animals may be embodiments of spirits. Many are worshiped as sacred, such as the cow and monkey in India.

Plants can also contain spirits and some are worshiped. Forests are seen as places where the spirits dwell. Trees like oaks, cedars, and ash are worshiped in Europe. In many parts of the world, there exist numerous subhuman beings that are supposed to live in lakes, forests, and caves. For example, in Europe they include mythical beings like trolls, gnomes, and fairies.

The unseen world of animism begins with the understanding of "mana," or the life force that permeates the entire universe. This power is impersonal and not worshiped. This sacred power concentrates more heavily in the deities, sacred people, places, or objects. This mana rules over all creation and is not controlled by the gods or man.

Also part of the unseen world is the Supreme God. Following him are a host of lesser gods who dwell in particular regions.

Following the gods are the spirits, who often dwell in nature and are confined to a specific area. Then there are the spirits of the ancestors who continue to play a role with the living.

There also exist unseen forces that include supernatural powers like fate, cosmic moral order, the evil eye, magic, and witchcraft. There are also impersonal energy forces in objects that give the objects power. These objects are believed to give a person power to do good or evil.

In the Bible, God transforms the animistic views of Israel into a biblical view. He teaches them that the other gods are not gods at all (Isaiah 43:10). He condemns the use of magic, witchcraft, and divination. He shows that suffering is not the result of the spirits or the gods but His sovereign act of bringing people back to Himself.

## **Themes in Animism**

Do you ever wonder why some Christians worship their ancestors? It derives from the first of several themes within the ancient religion of animism. The first of the themes is a community-centered life. The ancestors, the living, and the unborn are the center of existence. The clan life is the most important entity because an individual has meaning only in the context of a community.

The second theme is the role of the spirit world. Humans live in a world surrounded by supernatural beings and forces, most of which are hostile to humans. The worlds of the seen and the unseen are interconnected. For this reason, people spend their time seeking to appease the gods, the spirits, and the ancestors with offerings or bribes. Extreme care is taken to maintain the harmony between the two worlds. Since all created things are connected, a simple act like eating a fruit from the wrong tree may bring disaster.

Third is the focus on the present. The primary concern is with the here and now. People seek to deal with success and failure, power and knowledge needed to control life.

Fourth is the focus on power. People view themselves as constantly struggling against spirits, other humans, and supernatural forces. Everything that happens can be explained by powers at war. The goal is to attain power to control the forces around them.

Fifth is pragmatism. Animists are not interested in academic understanding of spiritual and scientific truth but in securing good, meaningful life and protection from evil. The test of a folk religion is, "does it work?" To achieve their goals, most people will turn to several methods that may be contradictory in hopes that one will work. I was once speaking to a Chinese woman who was suffering from lung cancer. Although she attended church and prayed to the Lord for healing, she also visited the Chinese Buddhist temple seeking prayers for healing from the priests. For those in animistic cultures, in times of need people will beseech aid from various religions or gods to find a method that works.

Sixth is transformation and transportation. Things may not be what they appear to be. Spirits can take the form of animals or plants. Shamans in a trance believe they can travel to distant places and bring harm to an enemy. They also believe they can travel to the spirit world, find information, or retrieve lost souls.

Seventh, animism takes a holistic view of life. The obsession with invoking good luck and avoiding bad luck involves every aspect of life—from what you eat, to where you place furniture (such the current feng shui fad), to how you sleep. In Al Hambra, Los Angeles where there is a large population of Chinese, houses with the number "4" in the address do not sell. The number four, pronounced "shee" in Chinese, is the first letter in the word for death, so the number is

considered very unlucky. [\[1\]](#)

Eighth is particularism. People are tied to their land. Each community has its own set of gods and spirits. The gods gave the people their land, and that is where the ancestors reside. In battles, victories and defeats are attributed to the power of the territorial gods.

Finally, fear plays a major role. In a world full of spirits, omens, and spells, life is rarely secure. Many see the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with spirits and forces antagonistic to people. Seemingly mundane activities such as moving the wrong rock can bring potential disaster. People turn to their ancestors, gods and spirits for protection.

The focus of the Christian life, in contrast, is the relationship believers have with God. God's relationship with mankind is based on grace and love. Since God is gracious, He does not need to be constantly appeased by believers. His laws are clearly revealed to us in the Bible. When we disobey, we may suffer the consequences of our sin or experience His discipline, which is always motivated by His love and intended to bring us to a right relationship with Him. In times of difficulty, we do not fear His wrath but He invites us to draw even closer to Him. 1 John 4:16-18 says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . ." Although believers encounter tragedy and suffering, we do not live in fear but in faith, trusting in the character of God.

## **Gods in Animism**

It may surprise you that most animistic religions teach that there exists one Supreme Being. He is often described as

omniscient, eternal, beneficent, omnipotent and righteous. He is the creator, the moral lawgiver, punishes those who do evil, and blesses those who do good.

However, this being has distanced himself from man and cannot be known personally. Legends abound that he was once near but was angered with man and removed himself. He left men to their own devices and used lesser gods and spirits to do His will and serve as His ambassadors.

Therefore, most of the worship goes to the lesser gods and spirits who are in direct contact with humans. Anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt studied numerous cultures and concluded that man's first religion was monotheism, which then corrupted into polytheism.[\[2\]](#) This would concur with Paul's timeline of man's rejection of God that he lays out in Romans 1.

An example comes from the folk religion of China. Long before Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, the Chinese worshiped Shang Ti, the Lord of heaven. He alone was worshiped until the Zhou dynasty, which began in 1000 B.C. From then on, only the emperor was allowed to pay homage to Shang Ti, and the knowledge of Shang Ti among the common people was lost. The worship-starved Chinese eventually embraced the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that provided spiritual knowledge and worship.[\[3\]](#) Numerous stories like these abound throughout the world. In Korea, the supreme God is called Hananim. The Gedeo people of Ethiopia call Him Magano. Missionaries use this belief of a high God to point people to the God of the Bible.

Following the Supreme God is a host of lesser gods. These beings mediate between man and the Supreme Being, but must first be paid homage. Gods possess specific powers and are localized to a geographical area. The gods inhabit places such as rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, etc. Some gods exercise power over human affairs (business, marriage, death, etc.) other gods exercise powers over nature (storms, rain, etc.)

Among the Hawaiians, Lono is the god of the oceans and controls the clouds and storms. Pele, the fire goddess, dwells in the volcanoes. Many still honor these gods in Hawaii today.

The biblical worldview teaches that a personal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God governs the universe (Colossians 1:16-17). He alone rules creation and there are no other gods besides him (Isaiah 43:10). The God of the Bible is not distant from man, but mankind has distanced ourselves from God. God remains involved in the affairs of this world, constantly pursuing men and women to receive His gift of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

## **Spirits and Ancestors**

Do you ever wonder if there are spirits in forests or other dark places? Can the dead communicate with the living? Animism holds to a belief that numerous spirits exercise their power over places where they dwell, such as mountains, streams, and rivers. Spirits have never inhabited human bodies, and since they can be either good or evil they must constantly be appeased. For example, the South Sea islanders ask forgiveness of the trees they cut down for canoes so that the spirits of the trees will not harm them.[{4}](#)

There also exist legendary half-divine beings. Some are humans who became gods. Some gods are thought to have become human. For example, the pharaoh of Egypt and the emperor of Japan were believed to be descendants of the sun god. Many teach these beings had supernatural birth and did not die, but vanished into the sky. Many are believed to have taught humans valuable skills like making fire, canoes, houses, planting fruits, etc.

Important in animism is the remembrance of the ancestors. Animism teaches that people possess immortal souls. At death the soul is free to wander near the grave, travel the earth, or enter the world of the spirits. The spirits of the

ancestors participate in the daily lives of family members. Neglecting to honor them has severe consequences. Souls of the departed who did not live fulfilled lives or died tragic deaths become ghosts. Ghosts search for bodies to inhabit and often bring harm.

At death, one enters the realm of the ancestors who maintain a relationship with the family. Ancestors remain deeply interested in the family they began. They care for, protect, and punish those who seek to do harm.

Ancestors are revered for several reasons. First, as the founders of the family, they remain interested in the care of the family. Second, they have answered the question of what follows death, so they can help the living through dreams, necromancers, and visions. Third, some have accomplished great achievements, which must be celebrated. Fourth, animists believe they protect the family. Fifth, they function as mediators between God and the family.

One's happiness in the afterlife depends on the care given by one's descendants. Anyone banished from a family or tribe in essence becomes extinct with no one to remember or care for them.

As Christians, we agree with the animists that there is an immaterial soul that exists beyond the grave. We also place the family as a high priority. One of the Ten Commandments is for children to honor their father and mother. However, no departed souls remain on earth. According to Hebrews 9:27 upon death, one is immediately in heaven or hell. Secondly, the dead do not have contact with the living. In Luke 16, the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him. Christians celebrate and honor the memory of our loved ones, but we do not worship them nor seek to appease their spirits. We wait with joy and anticipation in



knowing we will be united again in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Basic Practices in Animism**

In animism there are numerous taboos or prohibitions. Prohibitions are made to preserve the harmony between the spiritual world and physical world. Places or people where the life force is concentrated are protected. Myriads of taboos exist and violation of them can result in cursing of a community and must be atoned for by sacrifices.

Second, there are sacred places. Sacred places of worship exist to commune with the spiritual world. These are places where sacred power is concentrated. In Haiti there is a sacred tree where a pact with the devil was signed over 200 years ago by the animistic witch doctors. These witch doctors were most displeased when Christian pastors recently prayed over the tree and successfully commanded the spirits to leave it.

Third, there are sacred things. A whole host of objects possess power and are potentially dangerous. Stones are often believed to possess sacred power. This is one reason you can easily find crystal jewelry and other semi-precious stones for sale in catalogs and stores. Certain plants and insects are believed to be sacred and taboo. Carved images are believed to possess the spirit of divinities.

Fourth, there are sacred actions. Worship includes sacrifices of animals or plants to the deities. The priests or shamans perform the sacred rites. Omens play an essential role; this is the origin of saying "God bless you" after someone sneezes, to protect the spirits from jumping into the suddenly vulnerable person. Signs in the heavens and certain reptiles or animals encountered in a day (such as a black cat crossing one's path portending bad luck) may predict one's future.

Fifth, there are sacred words. There are many oaths, curses,

and blessings. The spells of both white and black witchcraft are sacred words. Words are charged with sacred power if uttered by a priest. Such words possess the sacred power, mana.

Sixth, there are sacred persons. Witches use their powers for good and evil. They can use their powers to protect communities from enemies. They can use their power to communicate with the gods and spirits. In most societies, witchcraft and sorcery are most feared. Witches are believed to travel great distances in short periods, kill at a distance, and master demons. Witches have supernatural powers to inflict harm on others. They can cast spells on others. They can inject foreign bodies into a victim, causing illness. Witches have the ability to communicate with dead spirits. Many societies believe they can transform themselves into animals.

Then there is the shaman or the medicine man. He can cure sicknesses. He directs sacrificial rites and escorts souls to the other world. At times he can leave his body and observe events from a distance. He is born into the family or earns the job by passing tests and rituals. There is also the sacred king. Then there are sub-humans such as trolls and water spirits. Finally there are "little people," such as leprechauns.

Seventh, there are sacred rituals that must be performed regularly. The head of the family performs some; others require the expertise of the priests.

Eighth, there is the practice of magic and divination. The art of casting spells and communicating with the spirit world are reserved for the priests.

The Christian must be aware when his practices are influenced by animism. Often many feel that saying "amen" or wearing a cross brings protection. Others use sacred stones or believe

performing a ritual will bring them fortune. A Christian has direct access to God through Christ and does not need to rely on another person or a sacred office. Also, Christians have all we need in Christ and do not need powers from the spiritual realm. Christ has given us all we need to overcome.

## **Overcoming Animism**

As our study has revealed, fear is the overriding disposition among those in animistic religions. There are several reasons for this. First, one is never really sure if a taboo has been broken and the gods, the spirits, or the ancestors have been angered. Should one of these beings become angered, they may inflict horrific punishments. In Hawaii, there are several frightening stories about the night marchers, the spirits of ancient warriors who march along a sacred path each night. It is believed that some people have been killed because they were in the path of the night marchers.

A second reason for the prevalence of fear is that animism includes some of the most feared practices known to man. Sorcery, magic and voodoo are some of the ancient arts that strike terror in the hearts of people. It is a frightening thing to know that a priest or witch has placed a curse upon you.

Throughout the Bible and even today, believers continually encounter animistic practices and thinking. In times of crisis, many young Christians will pray to God, but also seek help from their animistic religion.

Among Christians, animistic beliefs will be displaced only when Christians transform their minds with God's word and free themselves from the life of fear in animism. Transformation takes place when Christians understand the Bible explains the true nature of the universe. First, in contrast to the many temperamental gods in animism, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Isaiah 43:10 states, "'You are my witnesses,'

declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.'" There is no pantheon of gods—only the one true God, and all others are false gods.

Second, in the Bible God forbids the animistic practices of witchcraft, necromancy, magic, and worship of foreign spirits. Deuteronomy 18:10 commands, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination, sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who consults the dead." Those who practice these arts are entertaining spirits who are opposed to God and seek the destruction of all people.

Third, Christians do not need to live in fear of hostile spirit beings and spells. Christ, who loves His people, has triumphed over all. Colossians 2:15 says that He "disarmed the powers and authorities, [making] a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Christ has brought into submission all authorities under His rule. Not only that, nothing enters into our life until it first filters through His loving hand. God's hand of protection shelters His people. David wrote in the Psalms, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust'" (Ps. 91:1). When tragedy strikes, Christians understand that its purpose is not to punish believers, but to teach us new things about God and ourselves, refining our character to make us more like Him. Christians can be freed from a life of fear and find joy in a life of faith in Christ.

## Notes

1. Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1999),

157.

2. Norman Anderson. *The World's Religion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 38.
3. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*. (Ventura, CA.: Regal Press, 1984), 62-70.
4. Hiebert, 55-56.

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