

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.
9. Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988), 54.
10. Smith, 321.
11. Brigham Young, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 29.
12. McConkie, 321.
13. Smith, p. 345-347. Also quoted in McConkie, 321.
14. Talmage, 426.
15. McConkie, 516.
16. Talmage, 421.
17. *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:22.
18. Young, 29.
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20. *Expositors Bible Commentary.*

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Examining the Book of Mormon – A Christian View

The book of Mormon needs to be evaluated by the light of scripture and its purported evidence for its reliability. Dr. Pat Zukeran shows that the bad character of the book's witnesses, the lack of archaeological support, and internal errors reveal it to be the flawed work of man, not God.

The Mormon Story

Some people believe the *Book of Mormon* is a new revelation from God given to Joseph Smith. Mormons recognize it as divinely inspired and equal in authority to the Bible, but others have reason to doubt its claims.

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt wrote in 1851, “The *Book of Mormon* claims to be a divinely inspired record. . . . This book must be either true or false. . . . If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever planned upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will sincerely receive it as the word of God. . . . If true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it.”[\[1\]](#)

In this article, we will take a look at internal and external evidences for the *Book of Mormon* to see if it should be considered inspired writing.

The *Book of Mormon* is said to be a record of two ancient

Jewish civilizations that migrated to America. The Jaredites left Babylonia during the building of the Tower of Babel in approximately 2,250 B.C. After establishing a civilization in America that lasted two thousand years. They eventually succumbed to corruption and apostasy and were judged by God and destroyed.

The second group of Jews left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. before the Babylonian exile during the reign of King Zedekiah. This group crossed the Pacific and landed on the west coast of South America. Lehi and his son Nephi led these righteous Jews. This group eventually divided into two warring camps, the Nephites and the Lamenites and spread throughout North and South America. The Lamenites were cursed with dark skin because of their evil deeds and were the forefathers of the American Indians.[{2}](#)

Latter-day Saints believe that during the end of the 4th century A.D. the Nephite prophet general Mormon and his son Moroni, compiled the records of these two civilizations using the Reformed Egyptian language and recorded them on gold plates. Moroni hid the plates in the hills of Cumorah near Palmyra, New York to be revealed at a later time. The Lamenites eventually destroyed the Nephites in 421 A.D. on the Hill Cumorah. The Lamenite civilizations continued to degenerate and had forgotten their Jewish history. When Columbus found them centuries later, they had become as the *Book of Mormon* describes them, a "filthy and a loathsome people." (*Book of Mormon* 5:15)

Does the *Book of Mormon* qualify as divinely inspired scripture? In determining the answer, we will take a critical look at several key issues. First we will look at the nature in which Joseph Smith received his revelations. Second, we will investigate the character of the author and the key witnesses. Third, since the *Book of Mormon* claims to be a historical work, we will see if there is evidence to support this claim. Finally, since the *Book of Mormon* says it is the

most perfect book ever written, we will examine it to see if it contains any false precepts. Let's examine the Book to see if it is an inspired ancient historical record or a nineteenth century product.

Origin of the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons believe Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 as a glorified resurrected being, and delivered to him the golden plates from their hiding place in the Cumorah hills. Using an occult seer stone, Smith translated the history of the Lamenites and Nephites into the *Book of Mormon*.[\[3\]](#)

In studying the origin of the *Book of Mormon*, we must first investigate the issue of the canon of scripture. Christians believe the canon is closed with the 66 books of the Bible. There are no more revelations outside these books. Here are some reasons why.

First the authority to write the Holy Scripture was given to the Old Testament prophets of God and the New Testament Apostles of Christ. The last apostle died at the end of the first century A.D. and there has not been anyone who fulfills the qualifications for apostleship since then.

Second, the canon is confirmed to be closed by Judaism, Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church. According to the writings of eye witnesses—Emma Smith (one of Joseph Smith's wives), William Smith (his brother), and David Whitmer (one of the three key witnesses), Smith used a common occult practice of crystal gazing.

In 1877 David Whitmer wrote,

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the *Book of Mormon* was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of

something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the *Book of Mormon* was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any power of man.”{4}

Emma Smith wrote to her children, “In writing for your father, I frequently wrote day after day. . . . He sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.”{5} So according to these accounts, Joseph Smith received his revelations word for word and used a seer stone.

By contrast, the Bible was not given to us in a word for word dictation form, nor is there a case of any biblical writer using an occult object to receive revelations from God. Mormons point to the use of the Urim and Thummim but their purpose was quite different. The Urim and Thummim were used for a time by the Aaronic priests only to gain answers of Yes or No from God to particular questions. Lots were cast to discern God’s will, not to receive content for revelation. Finally, we must understand, the Aaronic priesthood and its practices are replaced by the finished work of Christ (Hebrews 7:12). Occult methods, such as crystal gazing, are forbidden in the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Leviticus 19:26, 31). Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie even denounces using objects to gain new revelation. He condemns Hiram Page, one of the witnesses of the *Book of Mormon* for using a seer stone to gain new revelations. Joseph Smith obtained his revelations contrary to the method of inspiration received by the biblical Prophets and Apostles.

Character of the 11 Witnesses

Joseph Smith claims that after he translated the plates, he returned them to the angel Moroni. Therefore, there is no way to verify the veracity of the plates or Smith's translation. Smith's only defense of his account is the eleven men who signed statements claiming to have seen the golden plates. Therefore, the credibility of Smith's account rests on the testimony of these eleven witnesses. There are three key witnesses who claim to have seen the angel show the golden plates to them. The remaining eight allege to have seen the plates but not the angel. The LDS church asserts these men never denied their testimony. However, when we examine the lives of the witnesses, we find they were untrustworthy, wavering, and gullible witnesses.

Six of the eleven witnesses, including the three key witnesses were eventually excommunicated from the church. Former Mormon President Ezra Taft Benson summed up the legacy of the eleven witnesses this way. "Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The three Witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* left the church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell—one even helped plot his death. . . . The wolves among our flock are more numerous and devious today than when President Clark made a similar statement [in 1949]." [\[6\]](#)

Let us first examine the character of the three key witnesses since their testimony is the most important. In a letter dated December 16, 1838, Joseph Smith stated this about the three key witnesses and John Whitmer, one of the eight. "John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris are too mean to mention." [\[7\]](#)

Martin Harris' testimony shows him to be a gullible and unstable man. He changed his religious conviction approximately thirteen times. He had joined several Christian denominations and other cult groups that include the

Universalists, Strangites, and the Shakers. {8}(Ankerberg, 196) In *Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph Smith gave revelations in which he denounces Martin Harris and calls him a “wicked man.”{9} The Mormon leaders published an article in the *Elder’s Journal*, a Mormon publication edited by Joseph Smith, in which they accused Harris guilty of “swearing, lying, cheating, swindling, drinking, with every species of debauchery. . .” (*Elders Journal*, August, 1838, 59).{10} Here the leaders of the Mormon Church strongly criticize the character of Harris.

Oliver Cowdery was also shown to be a very gullible man. He was led astray by Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses who himself claimed to have divine revelations from his own seer stone. Although Joseph Smith denounced Hiram as a false teacher, Smith stated “to our grief, however, we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive. . . . Brother Hiram Page had in his possession a certain stone, by which he obtained certain ‘revelations’ . . . all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God’s House, . . .”{11} Despite Smith’s condemnation, Oliver Cowdery joined Page’s movement. Not only was he a gullible man, he was also indicted on several accounts of fraudulent business practices. The Mormon Church in a letter wrote, “During the career of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer’s bogus money business, it got abroad into the world that they were engaged in it. . . . We have evidence of a very strong character that you are at this very time engaged with a gang of counterfeiters, coiners, and blacklegs . . .”{12} Cowdery was eventually excommunicated and he later joined the Methodist Church.

David Whitmer wrote, “God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to ‘separate myself from among the Latter- day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them.” In the spring of 1838, the heads of the church and many of the members had gone deep into error and blindness. . . . About the same time that I came out, the

Spirit of God moved upon quite a number of the brethren who came out, with their families, all of the eight witnesses who were then living (except the three Smiths) came out; . . .”{13} Here David Whitmer denounced the Mormon Church and encouraged people to follow his example and the example of the other witnesses and leave the church.

Joseph Smith in response attacked the character of David Whitmer. Smith stated, “God suffered such kind of beings to afflict Job . . . this poor man who professes to be much of a prophet, has no other dumb ass to ride but David Whitmer, to forbid his madness when he goes up to curse Israel: and this ass not being of the same kind as Balaam’s . . . he brays out cursing instead of blessings. Poor ass!”{14}

The character and life of the eleven witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* are very different from the Apostles of Christ. None of the Apostles wavered in their defense of Christ, even though all suffered and most died for their faith. The Apostles remained consistent in their teaching and never fell into any type of apostasy. Their lives were marked by honesty and integrity. They were never indicted for any criminal activity except for preaching Christ. The character of the *Book of Mormon’s* eleven witnesses does not strengthen Smith’s defense but cast further doubt on its authenticity.

Archaeology and the *Book of Mormon*

According to the *Book of Mormon*, Jews migrated from the Middle East to Central and South America and established great civilizations on the continents of North and South America. The *Book of Mormon* states that large cities were built so that by 322 A.D. “The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings and the people were as numerous almost as it were the sand of the sea.” (Mormon 1:7) Thirty-eight cities are specifically mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*. Also in the final battle between the Nephites and Lamenites, 230,000 Nephites were killed near the hills of Cumorah in New York.

With such a vast population and cities, one would expect to find numerous archaeological evidences to substantiate such large civilizations. However, there is no evidence to validate the claims of the *Book of Mormon*. Despite expeditions financed by the Mormon Church, archaeologists have concluded the *Book of Mormon* is not historical but a work of fiction.

The Smithsonian Institute in a letter to the Mormon Church 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 archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book." [\[15\]](#)

The National Geographic Society writes, "With regard to the cities mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*, neither representatives of the National Geographic Society nor archaeologists connected with any other institution of equal prestige have ever used the *Book of Mormon* in locating historic ruins in Middle America or elsewhere." [\[16\]](#)

Even Mormon archaeologists admit there is no conclusive evidence. Dr. Hugh Nibley, a Mormon apologist, states in his book *Since Cumorah* that no real archaeological proof for the Nephite civilization exists. He writes regarding the Nephites, "All that we have to go on to date is a written history . . . there is nothing whatever that an anthropologist or archaeologist as such can say about the *Book of Mormon*." [\[17\]](#)

Dee Green, professor of anthropology at Weber State University and a respected Mormon scholar states, "The first myth we must eliminate is that *Book of Mormon* archaeology exists . . . no *Book of Mormon* location is known with reference to modern topography. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful (nor any other location for that matter) were or are. It would seem that a concentration on geography should be the first order of business, but . . . years of such an approach has left us empty-handed." [\[18\]](#)

Another prominent Mormon scholar is B.H. Roberts. He was described as one of the most valiant writers and speakers in defense of the *Book of Mormon*. However, after years of research he concluded at the end of his life that the *Book of Mormon* was a fictional work created by Joseph Smith. He wrote, "the evidence I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America."[\[19\]](#)

Another prominent defender of the *Book of Mormon* was Thomas Ferguson, who was president of the New World Archaeological Foundation, which was funded by Brigham Young University and the Mormon Church. He hoped to discover archaeological support for the *Book of Mormon*. In 1962 he announced, "Powerful evidences sustaining the book are accumulating."[\[20\]](#) However, after years of research and many fruitless expeditions, his original hopes were shattered.[\[21\]](#) He eventually wrote,

With all these great efforts, it cannot be established factually that anyone, from Joseph smith to the present day, has put his finger on a single point of terrain that was a *Book of Mormon* geographical place. And the hemisphere has been pretty well checked out by competent people I must agree with Dee Green, who has told us that to date there is no *Book of Mormon* geography. I, for one, would be happy if Dee were wrong.[\[22\]](#)

In contrast, biblical archaeology has provided thousands of discoveries that have confirmed biblical references. Hundreds of ancient civilizations, artifacts, historical records and inscriptions have been discovered that prove the historical accuracy of the Bible. Archaeological discoveries confirming biblical accounts have been acknowledged by Christians as well as skeptics. Foremost Middle East archaeologist Dr. William Albright wrote, "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased

recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.”{23} When asked if archaeology confirms the accuracy of the New Testament, scholar John McCray states, “Oh, there is no question that the credibility of the New Testament is enhanced.”{24} A historical faith should have historical proofs. Historical research has led both Christians and skeptics to affirm the historicity of the Bible. However, historical research has proven damaging for the *Book of Mormon*.

Errors in the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons claim the *Book of Mormon* is the most perfect book ever written. Joseph Smith stated, “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 any other book.”{25}

Is Joseph Smith’s claim true? Errors in the *Book of Mormon* should cause one to question its divine inspiration.

In studying the *Book of Mormon*, one soon finds numerous historical, geographical, and scientific errors. First, in Mormon 9:32 the *Book of Mormon* claims to have been written in Reformed Egyptian, but Egyptologists say this language does not exist. Second, in Alma 7:10, Jerusalem is called a land or country when it is a city. In Alma 46:15 the saved in America take on the name Christian in 73 B.C. In the Bible, believers are not called Christian until 50 A.D. in Acts 11:3. Nephi 17:7 teaches that leprosy occurred in America in 34 A.D. but no cases of leprosy here are known until 1758. Mormon 9:2 and other references teach that the Indians had official records, scrolls, and other writings, but historical research shows no such records were kept. (Mormon 5:23, 3 Nephi 9:18, 12:18)

Not only are there historical errors, but there are false teachings as well. Alma 24:16 teaches that burying swords deep in the earth will keep them bright. Basic science proves that

burying steel objects causes decay and rust. 2 Nephi 13:24 teaches that baldness is caused by sin. Other absurdities include the teaching that God curses Indians with dark skin and anyone who marries an Indian will be cursed (2 Nephi 5:21 Jacob 3:3-9, Mormon 5:15-17, Alma 3:6-10). However, when Indians accept the Mormon teaching, they will become white and delightsome. (2 Nephi 30:5-7)

There appear to be internal contradictions also. In 3 Nephi 9:18, Jesus allegedly preached to the Nephites who fled Jerusalem in 600 B.C. with concepts communicated in the Greek language. But the Nephites are said to have written and spoken in Reformed Egyptian. Therefore, they would have no knowledge of Greek since Alexander, who lived in the 4th century, had not Hellenized the world yet. Jesus preaching to the non-Greek Nephites declaring, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," would have not made any sense. Moreover, Joseph Smith and the Mormons claim the gold plates from which the *Book of Mormon* was translated had no Greek or Latin in them.[\[26\]](#) However, Alpha and Omega are Greek, not Egyptian terms. Even stranger is that the French word "adieu" is used as a farewell in Jacob 7:27.

In contrast to the *Book of Mormon*, the Bible proves to be historically accurate and internally consistent. It also does not have the absurd teachings that we find in the *Book of Mormon*. The evidence appears to point to the fact that the *Book of Mormon* is not an ancient historical text, but an 18th century work created by Joseph Smith.

Notes

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3. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*. (Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1991), 98.

4. David Whitmer, "An Address to All Believers in Christ by a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon" (1887 reprint, Concord, CA: Pacific Publishing Company, 1972), 12, quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *What do Mormons Really Believe?* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 167-168.
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10. Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 96.
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The Mormon Veneer

Having spent many hours of conversation with those in Mormon leadership, Don Closson considers some of the theological assumptions behind today's evangelical-sounding Mormon proponents.

The Need for Precision

Recent events have helped to pull Mormonism from the fringe of American culture to a place much closer to mainstream thinking about religion and family. Mitt and Ann Romney's campaign for the presidency is only one factor among many contributing to a changing perception of Mormons and their beliefs. For instance, in March of 2011 a musical called *The Book of Mormon* opened on Broadway depicting Mormon missionaries in Uganda. It went on to win multiple awards including nine Tonys and a Grammy. We have also seen the production of popular cable TV programs depicting both real and fictional polygamous families in ways that make them much less controversial. The result is that modern and historical Mormonism seems a little less foreign or isolated from our everyday experiences.

A 2012 Pew Research Center poll found that while eight in ten Americans said they learned little or nothing about the beliefs of Mormons or about the church itself during the past presidential election, it found that Americans are now more likely to describe Mormons as "good people," "dedicated," and "hardworking."[1](#) This adds to the evidence that Mormonism has gained a favorable mainstream standing among typical Americans. This growing acceptance of individual Mormons adds to the perception that Mormonism itself is less controversial and perhaps different from other self-labeled Christian groups in only a denominational sense. Some, even in our Bible Churches, feel that we have been too harsh on Mormons and should seek to find common ground rather than point out



distinctive theological differences that keep us apart.

While finding common ground is an important part of sharing our faith in any setting, it is essential that when talking with Mormons we clearly distinguish between Mormon and traditional Christian beliefs. This is because both traditions place Jesus Christ at the center of worship and theology, creating an appearance of commonality when, in fact, little exists. The rest of this article will make these differences explicit.

Our society's heavy emphasis on tolerance places pressure on Christians to be more accepting of other belief systems, to focus more on loving people and less on insisting that our beliefs are in some sense universally true. However, it is possible to express love for people without sacrificing the truth that the gospel of Jesus Christ stands on. In the end, it is neither loving nor honest to sacrifice the good news found in the New Testament in the name of a redefined tolerance that refuses to admit that real differences divide orthodox Christianity from Mormon beliefs.

The Person of Christ

Mormons are highly offended when others question whether or not they are Christian. They point out that in 1830 Joseph Smith initially named their religious movement the Church of Christ and that Christ is at the center of every Latter-day Saints Sacrament service. So let me begin by acknowledging that Mormons do place a Jesus Christ at the center of their theological system and that I do not doubt for a minute the sincere faith of my Mormon friends in the Jesus taught by the Mormon Church. However, this leaves us with the problem of defining who this Mormon Jesus is. After all, it is the object of our faith that saves us, not faith itself.

[The Mormon view of Jesus](#) is dramatically different from the

traditional view held by Christians for the last two thousand years. Although we use the same names to identify him—Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, and the Word—and we agree on many of His sayings and actions, we differ widely on what kind of being He is. This is important if we are to place our salvation in His hands.

Mormons believe that all conscious entities—God the Father, Jesus the Son, angels, and humanity—are the same kind of beings. As Mormon Apostle John Widtsoe has written, “God and man are of the same race, differing only in their degrees of advancement.”^{2} They also believe that everyone on earth has existed from eternity past, first as disembodied intelligences, then as spirit beings born of God the Father and an unnamed Goddess, and finally incarnated into bodies of flesh and bone. It is interesting to note that, although Jesus is God the Father’s firstborn son, Satan and all of humanity are His spiritual brothers and sisters.

The only difference between you, me, and Jesus is that He has advanced further along the path of spiritual progression to Godhood than we have. According to Latter-day Saints teachings, Jesus is a god today because of His obedience to our heavenly Father and Mother, and to a set of eternal spiritual guidelines. What makes Mormonism dramatically different from traditional Christian belief is that it teaches that we, too, can become Gods just as Jesus has. In fact, it is the Father’s, or Elohim’s, desire that we all become gods and have our own spirit children just as He has.

Are we the same kind of being as God the Father and Jesus Christ? Since Mormons accept the Bible as revelation from God, is this what the Bible teaches? We need to grasp that Jesus is different from every other living thing in the universe, and very different from the way He is represented by the Later-day Saints.

The Latter-day Saints teach that all of humanity is

essentially the same kind of being as Jesus, just not as spiritually advanced. Rather than saying that Jesus is God in the flesh, they would emphasize that He is a man of flesh who has become a god. Mormons also reject the doctrine of the Trinity, the idea that there is one God, one being, revealed in three Persons. Instead, they teach that there are three separate beings united in purpose in the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who cooperate together in order to accomplish the Mormon plan of salvation.

As a result of this thinking, Mormons teach that Elohim in the Old Testament refers to the Father, while Jehovah or Yahweh refers to Jesus. But is this supported by the Bible? The OT uses Jehovah and Elohim as interchangeable titles for the Godhead, of which both the Father and Jesus are part. Deuteronomy 6:4 is a good example of this. It reads, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Jehovah] our God [Elohim] is one LORD [Jehovah].” It would be difficult to make this verse fit the Mormon view. Using their ideas it would have to be translated “Hear, O Israel: Jesus our Father is one Jesus.” This doesn’t make sense, especially if Jesus and the Father are two discrete beings.

The Mormon view runs into more difficulty in the New Testament. I asked a Mormon Bishop to confirm that Mormons believe that all sentient beings existed from eternity past, which he agreed to. Then I asked him to read Colossians 1:16-17 which states that Jesus created all things visible and invisible, that He existed before all things, and that all things are held together in Him. At this point I asked him to tell me which idea about Jesus he believed, that we have all lived in eternity past with Jesus or that Jesus made all things and was before all things. He thought for a moment and then replied that both statements are true. At which point I suggested that these are mutually exclusive ideas; we cannot have lived in eternity past with Jesus while at the same time Jesus was before us and made us. He finally admitted that when

faced with logical contradictions like this he has to trust in what his prophet Joseph Smith taught.

This is a pretty important idea. Either Jesus is eternally God who, with the Father and Spirit, brought into existence all things and holds all things together moment by moment as the Bible teaches, or He is merely a human being who happens to be more spiritually advanced than we are.

The Atonement of Christ

If you ask a Mormon what he is trusting in for salvation, he will most likely say that it is the atoning suffering and death of Jesus Christ in the garden called Gethsemane and on the cross. They also believe that there is no other hope by which we can be saved. Although this sounds pretty good to an evangelical's ears, these words mean something quite different than what traditional Christianity teaches.

According to the Latter-day Saints, Christ's death and suffering made it *possible* to be saved from sin, *if* we do our part.^[3] What this means becomes clearer when we read a parable given to explain what Christ's death accomplished in a chapter on the atonement in the Mormon book *Gospel Principles*.

The parable tells of a foolish man who ignored warnings about going too far into debt. Although he made payments along the way, he could not pay the debt in full when it came due. The creditor (God the Father) appeared and threatened to repossess all that the man owned and throw him into prison. The man begged for mercy, but the Father was only concerned about justice and the law. The parable weaves a picture of two eternal ideals, mercy and justice, in conflict.

Christ is depicted as a friend of the debtor who knew him to be foolish but loved him anyway. As mediator, Jesus stands before the Father and says "I will pay the debt if you will free my friend from his commitment so he may keep his

possessions and not go to prison.” Sounds good so far, but then Jesus turns to the debtor and says, “If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?” And then he adds, “You will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible.”

Although mercy is offered in the Mormon view, the word *grace* is nowhere to be found. This isn't a parable that teaches grace and forgiveness; it's a description of a loan being refinanced. Mormons believe that trusting in Jesus' atonement creates a path to salvation in that it provides for our resurrection and the forgiveness of past sins. However, to reach exaltation or complete salvation, in their view, one must earn it through celestial marriage, tithing, attending sacrament meetings, and sustaining the current Prophet, among other responsibilities.

Rather than earning our salvation, Paul teaches grace in Galatians 2:16, writing, “And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

The Priesthood

We come now to what Mormons believe to be at the heart of their theological system, the priesthood. They argue that along with the birth of their church in 1830 came a restoration of a priesthood that had been lost since the end of the apostolic period around A.D. 100. According to the Mormon Church, one cannot receive the Holy Spirit, be baptized or be married for time and eternity without proper priestly authority.

Mormons teach that priesthood power literally created heaven and earth; it is the power and authority of God himself. Mormon men can tap into this power, eventually obtaining to

two levels of priesthood. At the age of twelve, most Mormon boys are ordained as deacons of the Aaronic priesthood. By the time they are finished with secondary school, most have become elders within the priesthood order of Melchizedek. Throughout these years Mormon young men receive training, usually prior to the beginning of each school day, for various offices or positions within the two priesthood levels.

Mormons believe that every miracle in the Bible is an example of priesthood power. This is problematic for evangelicals. First, we don't associate miracles with priests. In the Old Testament it was usually prophets who performed miracles, not priests. In the New Testament, miracles are performed by Jesus and his disciples without mention of a specific priesthood. In fact, Peter says that all believers as priests^{4} and their function, according to Paul, is to proclaim the gospel of God.^{5}

The book of Hebrews teaches that the Mosaic covenant along with the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood was passing away because it was useless for making us righteous or holy. The author tells us of a better covenant and a better priest entering the picture as a result of Christ's ministry. We now have a new covenant in Christ's blood and Jesus is our permanent, perfect, and eternal high priest, replacing the limited imperfect priests of the Mosaic covenant.^{6} Nowhere are the followers of Christ told to train for or to seek entry into a priesthood. And Jesus is the only person given the title of priest according to the order of Melchizedek in the New Testament.

Although Mormons and Christians use similar language to describe their faith, they represent two very different belief systems. Mormons see themselves as eternal creatures working their way towards becoming gods and populating a planet with their offspring in the future. Traditional Christians draw a clear line between the creator and creation. We are not gods and will never become one.

Notes

1.

www.pewforum.org/Christian/Mormon/attitudes-toward-mormon-faith.aspx accessed on 12/21/12.

2. Apostle John Widtsoe (Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, SLC: Stevens and Wallis, 1945, p. 107).

3. *Gospel Principles*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, SLC, Utah, 1997, p. 75.

4. 1 Peter 2:9-10.

5. Romans 15:16.

6. Hebrews 8:6-7.

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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.
8. *The Holy Bible*, New King James Version, Deuteronomy 18:20-22) Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982).
9. *Doctrine and Covenants* 84:1-5 (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968). See also verse 31.
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.
16. Ibid., 49.
17. McConkie, 348.
18. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1950), 263.
19. Ibid.
20. McConkie, 348.
21. Doctrine and Covenants, 76:11-119.
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.

Crossing the Worldview Divide: Sharing Christ with Other Faiths

Christians need to introduce the gospel differently to people with different worldviews. Steve Cable provides ways to talk to Muslims, Hindus, Mormons and postmoderns.

Changing Worldview Landscape

Growing up in the sixties and seventies, I had very limited exposure to other worldviews significantly different from my own. Raised in a small town in New Mexico, I was exposed to a number of Hispanic Catholics, and I knew at least two families that were Mormons. Frankly, I never had either of those groups share their worldview with me. But, by and large, most people appeared to have a pretty conventional Christian worldview, answering the basic worldview questions as follows:

- *What about God? God is the creator and sustainer of this universe.*
- *What about man? Mankind is separated from God's provision by our sin nature.*
- *What about salvation? Jesus Christ is God's answer to our desperate need, offering redemption through faith in Him. When people die, those who have put their faith in Jesus will go to heaven while those who refuse will be relegated to*

hell.

- *What about history? History is a linear progression culminating in the creation of a new heavens and new earth.*

Since leaving the college campus in 1977, I have lived in suburbs of major metropolitan cities. Over the last thirty-five years, the makeup of those suburbs has changed significantly. I worked as an electrical engineer with several Indian Hindus and Jains. I teach English as a Second Language to a group of Muslims, Hindus, Baha'is, atheists and Latin American Catholics. From 2000 to 2010, the Muslim population of my area grew by 220%. All of these groups have a worldview significantly different from my own. In sharing Christ with them, I cannot appeal to the Bible stories they learned in vacation Bible school as a child. I need to be aware that what I say is being processed through their worldview filter. So that what they hear may not be what I meant to say.



The apostle Paul was very much aware of the issue of worldview filters. While on his missionary journeys, he preached the gospel

- *in synagogues established by Jews living away from Israel, [{1}](#)*
- *in market places containing Gentiles with a common Greek worldview, [{2}](#) and*
- *in front of Greek philosophers at the forefront of creating new worldviews. [{3}](#)*

In each of these environments, he preached the same truth: Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead for our sins. But he entered that subject from a verbal starting point that made sense to the audience he was speaking to. For example, in Athens he began by drawing their attention to an

idol dedicated to the unknown god and he quoted some of their poets. Was he doing this because the idol was really a Christian idol or because their poets were speaking a Christian message? Of course not. He was bridging the worldview divide between their thought patterns and those of Judaism. Having done that, he finished by saying, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."[\[4\]](#)

In the same way, if we want to share effectively with those from different worldviews, we need to make the effort to know how to share in a way that makes sense from their worldview perspective. We want to shake up their worldview, but we have to be able to communicate first. In the remainder of this article, we will consider the differences with and ways to share the gospel with people from four different worldview perspectives: Islam, Hindu, Mormon, and popular postmodernism.

Bridging Across to a Muslim Worldview

Islam is the second largest religion in the world with about 1.5 billion adherents or over 20% of the world population. In America, there are over 2.6 million Muslims with most of them located in major metropolitan areas accounting for 3-4% of the population in those areas. If you live in a metropolitan area, you are probably aware of several mosques in your area.

How can I share Christ with my Muslim acquaintances in a way they can understand? To answer this question, we need to understand how their worldview differs from our own and what communication issues may come into play. Let's begin by considering the four worldview questions introduced earlier:

- *What about God? Christians believe that a transcendent, loving God created the universe and mankind. Muslims believe*

that a transcendent, unknowable Allah created the universe and mankind.

- *What about man? A Christian believes man is created in the image of God, but mankind is now fallen and separated from God by our sin nature. Muslims believe that, although weak and prone to error, man is basically good and is fully capable of obeying Allah.*

- *What about salvation? For a Christian, the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to reunite with God through grace. Muslims must focus on good works to earn their way into heaven. They have no instruction as to what level of goodness is required. Certainly, they must pay attention to the five pillars of Islam: reciting the creed (the shahada), daily prayers, giving 2.5% of one's income to the poor or to the spread of Islam, a pilgrimage to Mecca, and fasting during Ramadan.*

- *What about history? For a Christian, the world is moving through time, not repeating itself, to reach the end God has prepared for it. For a Muslim time is a linear progression as well and it is moving forward exactly as Allah has willed.*

The key difference between our worldviews lies in the way to redemption: by faith through God's grace *or* as a reward for our good works.

How can you share effectively with Muslim friends and acquaintances? First, there are some important issues and confusing terms that will sidetrack your discussion in their minds. These include:

- ***The high cost:*** *in most Muslim families and societies, converting from Islam is a terrible offense, resulting in expulsion and sometimes death. Most Muslims will not enter into a conversation if they know the intent of it is to*

convert them to another faith.

- ***The Trinity***, including Jesus as God's Son: Muslims are told that Christians worship three gods when there is only one. This area is especially problematic in thinking that God could be born to a woman and be crucified.
- ***Belittling Mohammed*** will offend most Muslims, causing them to cease listening to you.
- ***Using corrupt Scripture*** by quoting from the New Testament which they have been taught has been changed and corrupted. An interesting note on this argument for Islam and against Christianity: a study of recently discovered early copies of the Quran show that current Aramaic copies of the Quran are only consistent with the early copies 88% of the time; while similar studies of the New Testament show a 98% reliability between current translations and the earliest documents.

Let's be clear. We are not saying that you don't need at some time to address the Trinity, the role of Mohammed as a false prophet, and veracity of Scripture. But first, you need to be able to communicate the gospel to them in a way that they will hear it.

To share with a Muslim, you must begin with prayer for your Muslim acquaintances who are captive to powerful social ties and equally powerful demonic lies. Pray that God will work to prepare their hearts. God has been working in powerful ways preparing Muslims to listen to the gospel of Jesus Christ.[\[5\]](#)

Start your conversation with their most important need. Ask them, "How can you be sure that you have done enough to get into heaven?" Listen to their thoughts on this important question. Point out that the gospels say, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."[\[6\]](#) Are they that good? God loves us and knows that we cannot do it on our own. For this reason Jesus came to pay our penalty through His death and bring us

into God's household through His resurrection.

In some Islamic countries, a good way to begin the discussion is to look at what the Koran says about Jesus to draw their attention to the specialness of Jesus. If they show an interest, you move quickly to the Bible as the true source of information on Jesus and eternal life. For more information on this approach, check out *The Camel Training Manual* by Kevin Greeson.

Bridging Across to a Hindu Worldview

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world with about 900 million adherents. However, there are only about 1.2 million Hindus in the United States, about 0.4% of the population. Since they are mostly located in high tech, urban and suburban areas, the percentages are much higher in those areas, closer to 2% and growing. If you live in a major metropolitan area, you have probably seen one or more temples in your area.

How does the Hindu worldview compare with a Christian worldview on the four worldview questions introduced earlier?

- *What about God? The Hindu believes that the universe is eternal and the concept of an impersonal god is contained in the universe.*
- *What about man? Hindus believe that our current state is a temporary illusion and our goal is to merge into the Brahman, the god nature of the universe.*
- *What about salvation? For a Christian the answer to our problem is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to become reunited with God. This salvation can begin now and will be fully realized in heaven. For a Hindu, the answer to our problem is to live a life in such a way as to merge with Brahman at death. Unfortunately,*

the vast majority will be reincarnated to suffer again as another living creature.

- What about history? For a Hindu, the universe is eternal and history repeats itself cyclically.*

As you can see, the worldview of a Hindu varies significantly from that of a Christian on almost every point. Salvation for a Hindu is to reach a state where they no longer exist. They are integrated into the universal god. Both Hindus and Christians believe that mankind faces the problem of being born into a world full of suffering and hardship. For Hindus, there are three paths that could lead one out of this situation into oneness: 1) performing appropriate good works, 2) reaching a state of knowledge that pierces through the deception of this existence, and 3) devoting oneself to service of one of the many gods.

Being aware of these worldview differences can sensitize us to some of the communication problems in sharing with a Hindu. First, when you share with them that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth in the flesh, they will probably agree with you wholeheartedly. This is exactly the response I received when sharing with a Hindu couple at a Starbucks in an exclusive shopping area. After all, there are many forms of god in the Hindu pantheon. Just because someone is a god, doesn't mean I should leave off worshipping my current gods to worship this new god exclusively.

How can I share with a Hindu in a way that helps be clearly explain the gospel in the context of their worldview? I would suggest two important aspects.

First, you can begin by asking this question: What if there were only one God who transcended His creation? We are not created to be subsumed back into God, but rather we were created in His image to be able to exist with and to worship our Creator. Our Creator does not want us to worship other

gods which we have made up to satisfy our desire to understand our world. If you cannot get a Hindu to understand this basic premise, then other things you tell them about the gospel will be misinterpreted because of their existing worldview filter.

Second, you can tell them that you agree that the problems of this world can be seen in the pain and suffering of life on this planet. Man has tried for thousands of years and yet the pain and suffering continue. This state of despair is the direct result of man's rejection of the love of God. We can never do enough in this life through good works, special knowledge, or serving false gods to bridge the gap back to God. God was the only one who could fix this problem and it cost Him great anguish to achieve it through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[\[7\]](#)

Bridging Across to a Mormon Worldview

There are only about 15 million Mormons worldwide, but almost 45% of them live in the United States. They make up about 2% of the population of the United States. Compared to Muslims and Hindus, their U.S. population has remained fairly constant as a percentage basis over the last few decades. Because of their young adult missionary teams, many Americans have had some exposure to the evangelistic message of Mormonism.

How do Mormons compare with Christians in answering the four worldview questions introduced on day one? First, we need to understand that not all Mormons believe the same things. The president of the Mormons can introduce new doctrine which may contradict prior doctrine. One prominent example is the Mormon doctrine on blacks which was changed in 1978. The statements below represent my understanding as to the current orthodox Mormon position:

- *What about God? Where a Christian believes that God is eternal and transcendent, Mormons believe God was once a man*

like us and ascended to godhood

- What about man? Where a Christian believes that man is born in sin and separated from God, Mormons believe men are born in sin, but have the potential to become gods in their own right*
- What about salvation? Where Christians believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, Mormons believe salvation comes from putting our faith in Jesus and performing good works. The good works are intended to pay back Jesus for the price He paid for us. In addition, Jesus is not eternal but was born to God and one of His spirit wives.*
- What about history? Both Christians and Mormons believe that history is linear, but Mormons believe it is leading to a day when they could be gods ruling their own planets.*

Even though some would like to consider Mormonism as a branch of Christianity, one can see there are significant differences between the beliefs of Mormons and Christians.

In sharing your faith with a Mormon, there are terms and concepts you need to watch out for as they will be misinterpreted. First, you are relying on the Bible as the complete and only direct revelation from God. When you do that, you need to be aware that they will assume anything you say that they don't agree with is countered in the Book of Mormon or the Pearl of Great Price. Point out to them that the clear meanings of the Bible don't need reinterpretation. Also, you can tell them that the Bible written between 2,000 and 4,000 years ago has been consistently supported by archaeological findings while the Book of Mormon written 175 years ago has no historical or archaeological support.

When talking about God the Father, Jesus, Satan, and man, be sure to make it clear that God and Jesus are one kind of

being, the transcendent God of the universe, that Satan is a created angelic being, and that men are created different from the angels. A Mormon will use those terms, but will normally group all four of those beings as made basically the same.

Be leery of expecting to win over Mormon missionaries on mission. If they are sharing with you, of course, you should try to share with them. However, normally they are too focused on fulfilling their mission to really listen to someone else. It is best to share with them when you introduce the topic.

In sharing with a Mormon, you may want to consider how good one would have to be to earn their way to eternal life. After all, Jesus said, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." If you can admit you are not perfect, then the only way to redemption is through God's grace.

Some of them may feel that in the matters of the church, they are keeping the faith in a sinless manner. What if a future president changes some criteria of behavior and you find out that you have now been sinning for years? Does it make sense to you that God's criteria for righteousness should change?[\[8\]](#)

Bridging Across to a Postmodern Worldview

Postmoderns may not seem as exotic as some of the world religions we have considered to this point. But they have a distinctly different worldview than do Christians and are the largest segment of non-Christians in today's America. An actual postmodern believes that absolute truth, if it does exist at all, is impossible to find. A Christian believes that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" and that "truth comes through Jesus Christ."[\[9\]](#) Jesus is truth applicable to every man in every situation. What do we need to understand about postmodernism to be better equipped to share the truth with them?

Popular postmodernity has a broadly defined identity, but they

should resonate with this definition: postmodernity is “incredulity toward metanarratives.”[\[10\]](#) In other words, they reject the possibility of anyone knowing truth about the basic questions of life; e.g., our worldview questions.

As before, we will begin with our four worldview questions. Keep in mind that we just said they don’t think anyone can know the truth about these types of questions.

- *What about God?* Postmoderns believe that we can’t really know where we came from but we probably evolved from nothing over millions of years.
- *What about man?* Postmoderns believe that humans are neither good nor bad and are shaped by the society around them which defines what is good and bad for them.
- *What about salvation?* For a Christian, the answer to our dilemma and hope for eternal life is the death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s Son. For a postmodern, each group has their own answer that helps them get through the hard times of life, but none of the answers can be counted on as true. What is important is not their truth, but their helpfulness in coping with life’s challenges.
- *What about history?* For a postmodern, history is linear moving forward to whatever happens next. Hopefully, the future will be better than the past, but there is not grand plan or purpose for mankind. In any case, if there is a grand plan, we can’t know it with any certainty.

It is hard to present Jesus Christ as the source of all grace and truth to someone who denies the existence of truth or at least our ability to know it. As Dave Kinnaman writes in his book *UnChristian*, “Even if you are able to weave a compelling logical argument, young people will nod, smile, and ignore you.”[\[11\]](#) Constructing a rational argument for Christ may not be the place to start. As Drew Dyck reported hearing from one postmodern, “I don’t really believe in all that rationality.

Reason and logic come from the Western philosophical tradition. I don't think that's the only way to find truth." Dyck concluded, "They're not interested in philosophical proofs for God's existence or in the case for the resurrection."[{12}](#)

To begin the process, we need to develop their trust; be their friend. Possibly, invite them to serve alongside you in ministering to the needs of others, exposing them to the ministry of Christ to the world around them.

The postmodern should be interested in your personal story, the things you have found that work for you. But don't fall into the traditional testimony rut (i.e., I was bad, I was saved, now I am wonderful); make it real by sharing real issues you have dealt with. Then convey the gospel story in a winsome way, emphasizing Jesus concern for the marginalized around Him, realizing the gospel is a metanarrative providing a universal answer to a universal problem.

Share with them why you are compelled to commit to a universal truth. I cannot live my life without making a commitment to what I believe to be the Truth. Saying "it doesn't matter" is basically giving up on eternity. Admit that claiming to know the truth about God, creation, and eternity is crazy from man's perspective. It can only be true if it is truly revealed by God. From my perspective, Jesus is the Truth.[{13}](#)

We've taken a very brief look at four distinct worldviews, different from a Christian worldview and different from each other. A simple understanding of those worldviews helps us avoid confusing terminology. We can focus on bridging the gap from their fundamental misunderstanding to faith in Christ. Only God working through the Holy Spirit can bring them to true faith, but we can play an important role in making the gospel understandable when filtered through their worldview.[{14}](#)

Notes

1. Acts 17:1-2, 17 for example
2. Acts 17:17, 19:9ff for example.
3. Acts 17:18-32
4. Acts 17:30-31
5. See the web articles "[Breaching the Barriers to Islam](#)" by Steve Cable and "[Islam in the Modern World](#)" by Kerby Anderson. Both can be found at www.probe.org.
6. Matthew 5:48
7. For more information on Hinduism, you can access the article "[Hinduism](#)" by Rick Rood at www.probe.org.
8. For more information on Mormonism, please access "[Understanding Our Mormon Neighbors](#)" by Don Closson and "[Examining the Book of Mormon](#)" by Patrick Zukeran. Both can be found at www.probe.org.
9. John 1:17
10. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans., Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.
11. Dave Kinnaman, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan), 2007.
12. Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2010
13. See the article "[The Answer is the Resurrection](#)" by Steve Cable at www.probe.org
14. For more information on postmodernism, you can access "[Truth Decay](#)" by Kerby Anderson and "[Worldviews Part 2](#)" by Rick Wade at www.probe.org.

“You Shouldn’t Dis the Mormons Unless You’re a Member”

I think religion is great! I don't however see why we have to dis other people. We are all children of God and here trying to get back to Him. I hate it when I see all these sites talking bad about the Mormons. They aren't bad people, they just believe a little different. I think it's kinda cool the things they do, like work in their temples for people that have passed on. In the Bible it says that we need to be baptized to enter into heaven and what if someone didn't get the chance, they can still be saved because of the Mormons beliefs. It also talks about baptisms for the dead in Peter, so it is scriptural. I also had a thought. Are you guys Active Members in Full Fellowship of the Mormon Church? If not why are you talking about the Mormons? It's like this, If you have a Ford Explorer and it has a very serious electrical problem that requires specific dealer attention, are you going to take it to a BMW Dealer.... I personally don't feel that is very Christ-like talking bad about other religions whomever it may be. Why don't we focus on our own churches and magnify our own beliefs and our own salvation [rather] than attack other religions that are trying to do good according to what they know. Why can't we all just love our neighbors like Jesus Christ says? Whata ya say.

We certainly aspire to love our neighbors as Jesus commanded. But being loving and gracious does not exclude truth telling. In fact, ignoring the issue of truth is not very loving at all. If we believe that someone is in danger it would be cruel not to inform them. Certainly, we are to do this with gentleness and respect as Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:15-16, but we are still responsible for sharing the truth in love. Jesus

warned that there would be false prophets, and that they would be dangerous (see passages below). The danger is that people might be deceived into trusting a gospel that is not capable of saving them. The price for being deceived is steep: spending eternity separated from God.

Actually it is the Mormons who first charged that all of traditional Christianity is apostate. The message that Joseph Smith supposedly received from the divine figures in his first vision is that all the denominations and teachers at that time were an abomination to God. Mormons claim that they are restoring the true gospel that was lost a short time after Christ. There is a long tradition within Christianity, going back to the first generation after the birth of the church, to defend itself against new gospels and new messiahs. Defending biblical Christianity against the claims of Mormonism is the responsibility of everyone who claims the Christ of the Bible as their savior.

Although tolerance has come to mean that we are to hold all ideas equal, that is not what the word means. To tolerate someone you must first disagree with them, otherwise there would be no need to be tolerant. A tolerant individual gives someone he disagrees with an opportunity to make their case, to convince them that their view is correct. After meeting with Mormon bishops for over four years I feel that I have been tolerant and will continue to do so in the future.

Sincerely,

Don Closson

False Prophets – Matthew 7:15-23 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot

bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. 21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

False Christs – Matthew 24:5 For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.

False Gospels – Galatians 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

False Gods – Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.”

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“You Should Improve Your Article ‘A Short Look at Six World Religions’”

My name is _____ and I am a born again Christian. I have a BA in Pastoral Theology and a MA in Philosophical Theology. I believe that there could be improvements to your article [A Short Look at Six World Religions](#).

I do believe that “snapshot” looks at our neighbors’ faiths

are valuable but they do have limitations. It can be difficult to convey the rich diversity of their sects, denominations, and teachings. This being the case, and given that adherents of any faith often do not align strictly to orthodox doctrine, it may be worth noting in your piece in the sections that deal with "relating with folks from these faiths" that on top of prayer and Biblical knowledge they should listen closely to the others' perspectives. Listening at first will give more clarity to the type or specific tradition the person is a part of.

Islam has been called a religion of works, but I have found this to not be true upon both study and speaking to Muslims. They are fully dependent on Allah's mercy and the grace of God. They will often say that even if they were perfect and without sin, God could cast them into hell if he wanted because God owes no one anything—it is His grace and mercy alone that allows salvation. This is an important facet of Islam that I feel should be included. The six tenets of faith are of course much more flexible in many Muslims' eyes than the five pillars and this could be emphasized. I also would say that Islam is no more fatalistic than many expressions of Christian faith. As many Christians would say, God is sovereign and everything that happens is in His purview and is because He allows it. Even Satan's and hell's existence is only because of His allowing it to be so. I do not think of Christianity is fatalistic because of this teaching. One Christian tradition that may deviate from this is Process Theologies of Christianity, which in my reading give more a 'participant' role to God than 'sovereign'. You write that Allah is a distant spiritual being, but again this is not how I have heard Muslims describe God. They will often as Christians do also balance transcendence and immanence. I have read of Allah being the center of all things, not 'out there'. It is we who may feel like we're 'out there' when we are distanced by sin.

I appreciate that you note Hinduism's diversity. *Star Wars*, however, I would argue is closer to Taoism.

There are some forms of Buddhism that pray, and worship divine beings. I would disagree with C.S. Lewis—Buddhism may be said more properly to be a 'reformation' of Hinduism, not a heresy. Buddha wanted to bring a more 'democratic' and less austere faith. The 'I don't exist' is the ego. A Buddhist would recognize a pinch hurts and that a pinch hurts any living creature. Buddhists would say that Nirvana is not a goal, and is not something that is sought. There is no inconsistency of no-self and karma continuing the ripple effects. Karma is just cause-effect. A Buddhist would seek to absolve all action, cause-effect. Though a person dies, the consequences of their actions will still effect the next generation and their environment.

It may be worth noting the Messianic Jewish movement—I worshipped alongside these folks in a St. Paul Minnesota Temple and they are really Jews for Jesus!

It may be more appropriate to refer to Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses as 'sects' rather than cults as this is the trend in writing, commentary, and popular usage.

I hope that some of this may be useful to you, even if to a small degree. I do thank you for your ministry at Probe and am grateful that you write on these other religions with great love in your writing voice. My best wishes to you!

Thank you, _____.

It may be helpful for you to understand that the article on our website is the radio transcript of a week of programs I was asked to do for Moody Radio some years ago, giving a 35,000-foot overview of major religions to their radio audience in a very restricted time parameter. And that's why it's called a "Short" look at world religions.

Your excellent observations are about fine-tuning the details of an article that was intentionally written with broad brush strokes. So I'm going to add it to our website from a link at the bottom of the article, highlighted in a "See Also" box.

Thank you, thank you for "hearing" the love in my heart and in my fingertips as I wrote this article! You have greatly blessed me today!

Warmly,
Sue

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"As an Ex-Mormon, How Do I Find a Church That's Not a Cult?"

I was raised a Mormon, I now know it is a cult and totally wrong. I am Christian now. I am having difficulty finding a church I can go to as I am afraid of being sucked into another cult.

Many have asked for guidelines regarding what church they should or should not join, as well as how to recognize a cult. The question might be expanded to include a broader spectrum of religious organizations. This range could include churches that are both orthodox and healthy, orthodox but unhealthy, pseudo Christian cults, and finally organizations that claim a completely different religious tradition. The progression might look something like this:

Orthodox & Healthy → Orthodox & Abusive → Cult (Christian) →

World Religion (Other religious traditions)

The goal would be to attend churches that are both orthodox in their theology and that are governed by a group of men who model a Christ-like form of servant leadership. There should be a healthy balance between building up believers and sending them out to serve and reach the world. Churches can often become unhealthy when they have a completely inward perspective. Unfortunately, there are churches with orthodox theology that become [abusive](#) due to leadership that is either immature or that chooses to lead in a manipulative and abusive manner. This can happen when a pastor lacks significant oversight by a competent board of elders/deacons or when men who are not good candidates become elders/deacons and hire a young or inexperienced pastor.

The term orthodox basically means to conform to tradition. In this case we are referring to the tradition or teaching of Christ's apostles as found in the Bible. Some have defined it as what all Christians everywhere have believed. The first seven ecumenical councils of the church established Christianity's theology regarding the nature of God and the person of Christ. These beliefs are a good test for orthodoxy. In general, Christians believe that there is one God who has revealed himself in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit (one essence, three persons). Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man, and has been co-equal with the Father since eternity past. It has also believed that the death of Jesus Christ is the only atonement for sin.

A pseudo-Christian cult usually denies the deity of Christ or his humanity (Gnostics). As you know, Mormonism denies the trinity, claiming that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate gods with a similar or united purpose. There is much more that could be said about each movement (Mormons, JW's) but you can check our articles on the web for that info. Ron Rhodes defines a cult in one of his books in this manner:

A cult may be defined from both a sociological and a theological perspective. Sociologically speaking, a cult is a religious or semireligious sect or group whose members are controlled or dominated almost entirely by a single individual or organization. A sociological definition of a cult generally includes (but is not limited to) the authoritarian, manipulative, and sometimes communal features of cults. In this type of cult, converts are sometimes cut off from all former associations, including their own families. The Hare Krishnas, The Family (“Children of God”), and Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church are examples of this kind of cult.

*Theologically speaking, a cult is a religious group that claims to be Christian but in fact denies one or more of the essential doctrines of historic, orthodox Christianity (as defined in the major historic creeds of Christianity). Such groups deny or distort essential Christian doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and salvation by grace through faith alone. Cults that fall into this category include the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. [Ron Rhodes, *The Culting of America*, p. 5)*

I hope that you find this helpful.

Don Closson

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“What Do Mormons Mean When

They Say Jesus Is Our Big Brother?"

I have two questions. I know that when Mormons say Jesus is our big brother, they take it literally. What do they mean by that? Second, what is the best way to witness to my Mormon friend?

First, Mormons believe that Jesus is our literal brother in the sense that we existed with him prior to our incarnation on earth. They believe that we all (Jesus included) existed prior to our bodily form as spirit children of Elohim and God the Mother. In fact, prior to this spiritual state, Mormons believe that we have existed for eternity past as intelligences. The only difference between Jesus and us is that he has been more faithful and useful to the father. This all makes more sense when you realize that in the Mormon system there is only one form of sentient or intelligent life; God the father, the Son, the angels, and mankind are all of the same species. It looks something like this:

Intelligences → spirit beings → incarnate (fleshly) beings → god

Mormonism teaches that all of us are on this path of progression toward existing as a god.

Regarding your desire to inform your friend about the Christian faith, another good resource is the book *How Wide the Divide* by Blomberg AND Robinson. It is a dialogue between a professor at Brigham Young University and a seminary professor from Denver Seminary. It is very informative and it provides a good example for how Christians and Mormons can enter into dialogue with one another.

For Him,

Don Closson

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