“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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“The Bible is Full of Errors, So Why Do You Trust It?”

As a Christian fundamentalist group you believe the Bible is the Inerrant word of God and this highly prized book of canonized scripture is your infallible authority and source of truth. (Please correct me if I’m wrong.) Now, with that thought in mind, read what Christian scholars are publicly saying about the sacred canon of biblical scripture, and not just a few. [Link to document called “The Apparent Inerrant Word Of God” included in letter] (Understand, as a Christian Latter-day Saint, I strongly value the Bible too.) Here, you have some serious credibility issues to overcome in making the Bible everything you want and clam it to be. Christian scholars are now reaching the same conclusion about the Bible that faithful Latter-day Saints have known all along and they are finally speaking out. The truth is, the Holy Bible has errors – lots of them! Obviously, God did not intervene and “supernaturally” protect the sacred canon of biblical scripture, as some people erroneously believed.

Our primary focus for understanding these errors in the biblical record is the result of discovering ancient manuscripts, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, that have recently been found in our time. These ancient biblical and historical texts, lost in antiquity, have recently come forth from out of the dust and date back in time to around the Common Era, (CE).

All of these early documents predate any of the canonical writings of the New Testament by hundreds of years. There are NO original autographs existing from the New Testament record. All that remains today are generational copies of earlier manuscripts that were handed down throughout the centuries.

So, as I understand the common biblical record, the early Christian Saints should never have been separated or divided from their original apostolic teachings. Nevertheless, through the centuries of time and by a multitude of religious concepts that crept into the early church, this apparent division among the early Christian believers actually happened and today's Christian religious world is deeply divided.

But, whenever the Bible is being presented as authoritative, infallible, or Inerrant, I scratch my head and think to myself – Hold On – Now wait just a minute! From everything that we know and with the myriads of scientific and archeological evidence, your particular views on biblical authority, inerrancy, and infallibility don't exactly add up with all the facts. Infallible or Inerrant? Well, that's hardly the case, because errors exist in the copied manuscript records! And, as for biblical authority? Just look around the Christian community and you will see a staunch Bible expert standing on nearly every street corner. Only, which one is right?

The common thread running through the biblical Christian community is the canonized Holy Bible and that's where the problem is. So, if the Bible is guilty of doing all that, I would strongly suggest that the highly prized biblical canon is anything but authoritative.

Christian scholars have sufficiently demonstrated that you have reached the wrong conclusion for your erroneous "supernatural" biblical beliefs and who among you can dispute the facts? Anyone attempting to believe such nonsense is going to eventually look like an idiot and that's not good for the image! But, the choice is freely yours to believe whatever you

want; although, truth will be truth and error will be error, regardless of the disguise or package it comes in.

Thanks for your letter. Although your comments about the Bible are definitely weighted toward the moderate to liberal perspective of biblical scholarship, I would generally agree with much of what you wrote. Indeed, while I would disagree with some of the specifics in your letter, the general ideas expressed therein are well known to all of us here at Probe.

When conservative Christian theologians speak of "inerrancy," they are speaking with reference ONLY to the original writings—not the copies. Of course there are many variants in the copies we possess, but this can give a misleading picture of biblical reliability. Part of the reason there are so many variants is simply because we have so many copies. And this wealth of manuscript evidence allows us, through the science of textual criticism, to accurately reconstruct the original documents with a high degree of accuracy. New Testament textual critics maintain that we can reconstruct the original documents to about 95-99% accuracy. The Old Testament is slightly less than this, but it can still be reconstructed with a high degree of accuracy.

It's important to realize how variants are counted. If a particular "error" occurs in 3,000 manuscripts (e.g. a definite article written twice rather than once), this counts as 3,000 errors. Most of these variants are quite insignificant (e.g. spelling differences, a word left out, an extra word inserted, etc.) and can be easily corrected on the basis of many other manuscripts which have the correct reading. None of these variants affects a significant doctrine of Scripture. Discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls actually reinforce the notion that the Masoretic scribes were very faithful copyists. The manuscript evidence for the NT is far, far superior to any other book from the ancient world (e.g. Tacitus, Livy, Pliny, Herodotus, etc.).

Archaeological evidence has repeatedly verified the reliability of the biblical accounts. And no responsible scholar would say otherwise. Although there may still be questions about some issues, archaeology has overwhelmingly served to confirm the Bible, not disconfirm it.

Thus, while I generally agree with what you've written, I certainly don't think your letter gives the whole picture concerning biblical reliability. An excellent, comprehensive resource on this issue (from a conservative Christian standpoint) is *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded Edition* by Norman Geisler and William Nix (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986). This text has numerous chapters and delves into great detail on such issues as the inspiration of the Bible, canonization, transmission of the text, and translation. Conservative scholars have repeatedly responded to the charges of those who would like to discredit the general reliability of the Bible. I hope you'll give such scholars a chance to offer you another perspective on this crucial issue.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Understanding Our Mormon Neighbors – As Evangelical Christians

Mormon missionaries are sounding more and more like evangelical Christians. Has something changed in Mormon theology? A group of evangelical theologians have opened a

dialogue with their Mormon counterparts and argue that the LDS movement is indeed changing. Don Closson considers these changes in Mormon thinking and how it affects our dialogue with our Mormon neighbors.

Mormon Neo-orthodoxy?

Have you noticed that Mormons are sounding more and more like evangelical Christians? In the last few decades individuals inside the Mormon Church, and many outside, have noticed a shift in the content and presentation of the Mormon faith. Certain aspects of Mormon theology, like the physical, limited nature of God, are either downplayed or left unsaid. Other aspects, like salvation by faith in the justifying work of Jesus Christ, are highlighted. Is something significant happening within Mormonism? Although Mormon theology has been somewhat fluid over the decades, some feel that a new band of Mormon scholars are indeed moving the religion in a new direction and that Christians need to be aware of these changes if we are to have effective dialogue with our Mormon neighbors.

Mormon sociologist Kendall White has been writing about this change in Mormon thinking since the 1960's. He writes that traditional Mormon theology produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by B. H. Roberts, James Talmage, and John Widtsoe, centered on an "optimistic humanism, finite theism, and [an] emphasis on human merit in attaining salvation."{1} The new movement, called neo-orthodox Mormonism by some, "stresses the omnipotence and sovereignty of God, human sinfulness and inability to merit salvation, and the necessity of salvation by grace."{2} The primary theological sources for neo-orthodox Mormons are the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The later writings of Joseph Smith, including sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the King Follett Discourse are seen as less helpful.

White argues that this theological trend is actually a return

to the earliest form of Mormon beliefs found in the 1830s. It's interesting to note that, while White admits that Mormon neo-orthodoxy is a valid form of Mormonism, he's not in favor of it. On the other hand, Robert Millet, past dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, argues that the neo-orthodox movement is a positive trend and more in line with the teachings found in the Book of Mormon.

In the book *The New Mormon Challenge* evangelical theologian Carl Mosser writes that neo-orthodox Mormons "promote an understanding of the relationship between works and grace that is openly modeled after noted evangelical pastor John MacArthur's expositions of 'Lordship salvation.'"{3} Mosser also argues that it is these neo-orthodox Mormon writers and teachers who are influencing typical Mormons today rather than those who support a more traditional Mormon theology.

The result is a new Mormon synthesis that may cause the traditional Christian to ask himself, Have the Mormons returned to the historic orthodox Christian faith? In what follows we will highlight some of this new Mormon theology in order to help the reader decide how orthodox neo-orthodox Mormonism really is.

Recent Events and Historical Patterns

It was a bit of a shock recently when I discovered that Ravi Zacharias, a highly respected Christian apologist, had addressed a mixed crowd of Mormons and evangelicals at the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City. Even more interesting is the fact that after his hour long discussion on the exclusivity of Christ, Zacharias received a standing ovation from the entire crowd. The apologist was introduced by Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary. Dr. Mouw began his comments by saying "Let me state it clearly, We evangelicals have sinned against you . . ." He added that not every evangelical has sinned against Mormons, but he feels that too often we are

guilty of misrepresenting what most Mormons believe and ignoring their pleas when they protest. He went on to argue that traditional Christians and Mormons have enough in common to profit from a dialogue. He explained that, “when my good friend [and Brigham Young University professor] Bob Millet says that his only plea when he gets to heaven is ‘the mercy and merit of Jesus Christ,’ I want to respond by saying with enthusiasm, ‘Let’s keep talking!'” Topped off with the music of Michael Card, this was a unique event. It had been over 100 years since the last evangelical spoke in the Temple; Dwight L. Moody preached there in 1871.

When considering the traditionally negative view that evangelical Christians have of Mormons, this kind of event can be difficult to evaluate. Also challenging are the results of a recent George Barna survey that found 26% of those Mormons that participated were classified as “born again” by their responses. How can this be? Are all these Mormons being disingenuous regarding their true beliefs? Part of the answer lies in the fact that at any given moment there are more first generation converts within Mormonism than there are second generation. Since Mormon evangelism is primarily aimed at the Christian population, it is not surprising that many who attend Mormon worship services have carried with them a more traditional theology and are often there because of the youth programs and the accepting community that often exists within Mormon Wards.

But another part of the explanation is a movement within Mormon circles that began with the presidency of Ezra Taft Benson. It has called Mormons back to their roots by focusing more on the Bible and the Book of Mormon and away from the later writings of Joseph Smith. The leaders of this movement have worked hard to distance themselves from the more speculative thoughts and writings of past LDS authorities.

Many evangelicals are hoping that the Mormon Church will go through something similar to the recent changes in the

Reorganized Latter Day Saints Church. This group was an early offshoot from the main LDS Church which never did accept many of the later writings of Smith. In recent years, its numbers have declined significantly because many have turned back towards a traditional evangelical theology.

The Mormon Neo-Orthodox Movement

Stephen Robinson is professor of ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He and Craig Blomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, co-wrote the book "How Wide the Divide" which explores both the similarities and distance between evangelical and Mormon theology regarding revelation, the nature of God, the person of Christ, and what one must do to be saved. Robinson passionately implores evangelicals to not give into a caricature of Mormon theology, one that few Mormons actually believe. He argues that there are legitimate reasons for misunderstanding between Mormons and evangelicals. They both use identical theological terms in different ways; in fact the LDS Church as a whole lacks a sophisticated theological language. Also, Mormonism's lack of professional clergy, creeds, catechisms, or theologians in the strict sense often contributes to the confusion.

In his book with Blomberg, Robinson complains that Mormons are chastised because they take the Bible too literally, actually believing everything in it that is written about God. He accuses evangelicals of accepting second and third century explanations of biblical truth that are dependent upon Greek philosophical thought rather than on what the Bible actually says. Both Blomberg and Robinson agree that the two sides hold to a very different description of God and humanity. But they also conclude that many of our differences are found in areas where the Bible is silent and where the Mormon canon has claimed to fill in the void with new revelation.

However, Robinson's greatest concern is that evangelicals take

him and other Mormons seriously when they claim to believe certain things to be true. For instance, Robinson believes that "through the atonement of Christ, fallen humanity may be saved by accepting and obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ."{4} He also argues that Mormons believe in the God of the Bible, "the Eternal Father, and in God's Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost."{5} He adds that they accept the biblical description of God as three and also one, but not the post-New Testament attempts to explain how this can be reconciled.

It would be more than impolite to accuse Dr. Robinson of being less that genuine when he personally claims to believe something. However, he admits that there is much theological speculation within Mormon circles and that it can be difficult to discover exactly what represents official Mormon doctrine.

Let's consider some specific examples of Dr. Robinson's beliefs and compare them to both traditional Mormon and Christian theology.

Robinson describes God as omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. However, he also believes that God and man are of the same nature or species, and that God has a body of flesh and blood. He denies that this constitutes a finite theism, a charge often attributed to Mormons. Robinson also states that salvation is only acquired through grace by faith in Jesus Christ. He argues at length that Mormons do not believe that one can be justified by works in the eyes of a righteous and Holy God, but instead that works follow justification and conversion. He attributes evangelical claims that Mormons believe otherwise to confusion about Mormon terminology and a deficient desire to really understand what Mormons teach.

How do these theological positions compare with traditional Mormon thought? Is this a new or neo-orthodox Mormonism? Mormonism has always held that God has attained his position via a path of eternal progression, and comments to that effect

by past Mormon leaders seem to conflict with Robinson's statements. For instance, when Mormon Apostle Orson Hyde said that God was once a child who rose step by step to be where he is today, it appears to contradict the idea of an unchangeable deity. Apostle John Widtsoe states the issue even more plainly. He says that God "must now be engaged in progressive development and infinite as God is, he must have been less powerful in the past than he is today."{6}

Robinson argues that there was once a time, before the beginning of our creation, that God was human. But he adds that any speculation about the events of that time is done so without support from the Bible or LDS literature. Robinson is different from earlier Mormons in being unwilling to speculate on how, or even when God rose from a finite human to an infinite God, but he still believes that it happened.

Robinson's beliefs about God are dramatically different from traditional Christian, and I believe biblical, teachings. The Mormon god is contingent or dependent on matter rather than its creator. He is finite in the sense that there was a time when he was not God, no matter how long ago that might have been. He is obviously not the First Cause or only self-existent being. Even though Robinson refuses to speculate on the origin of God, Mormon views imply that God is the offspring of other Gods, leading to polytheism which the Bible calls idolatry. As God said through Isaiah long ago, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."{7}

Are Mormons Christian?

Above we introduced ideas about salvation from the Mormon scholar Dr. Stephen Robinson, professor of Ancient Scriptures at Brigham Young University. He states that individuals are saved by accepting the gift God has provided in his perfect Son, Jesus Christ. Robinson believes that "If humans accept

this gift and enter the gospel covenant by making Christ their Lord, they are justified of their sins, not by their own works and merits, but by the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ accepted on their behalf."{8} He admits that the LDS Church is thoroughly Arminian, rejecting the Calvinist doctrine of eternal security, but that this shouldn't remove them from the sphere of biblical Christianity.

While not doubting that Dr. Robinson believes all this to be true, it is difficult to interpret Mormon doctrine in light of past statements by Mormon leaders and in Mormon writings. For instance, how do we interpret the Book of Mormon when it states "for we know that it is by grace we are saved, after all we can do"?{9} Or when Joseph Smith writes "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel"?{10} Even more disconcerting are statements made by Bruce McConkie, a popular Mormon writer. He writes that, "Repentance is a gift from God conferred upon those who earn the right to receive it. It comes by obedience to law." And again, he writes, it is a gift "reserved for those who abide the law that entitles them to receive it."{11} These statements point to an earned salvation based upon individuals fulfilling legalistic obligations, the kind of religion that Paul condemns in the book of Galatians.

Mormon teaching tools, such as the booklet *Gospel Principles,* also make statements that appear to contradict a gospel of grace. In a chapter titled "Freedom to Choose" the book states, "We began to make choices as spirit children in our Heavenly Father's presence. Our choices there made us worthy to come to earth. Our heavenly Father wants us to grow in faith, power, knowledge, wisdom, and all other good things. If we keep his commandments and make right choices, we will learn and understand. We will become like him."{12} Not only does this teach that salvation depends on works during this life, but also on works performed during a pre-existence as spirit

beings.

In spite of the recent changes in Mormon theology, a person who holds to the full spectrum of Mormon teachings has a view of God, salvation, and particularly the relationship between mankind and its creator, that is radically different from what traditional Christians believe and what we think the Bible teaches. This is not a reason to stop talking with Mormons; in fact, it is why we need to continue to express the reasons for the hope that we have in Christ.

Notes

1. Carl Mosser, *The New Mormon Challenge,* ed. By Francis Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) p. 78.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 79.
4. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL., 1997) p. 16.
5. Ibid.
6. Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, *Mormonism 101* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2000) p. 28.
7. Isaiah 45:5
8. Blomberg and Robinson, 144.
9. 2 Nephi 25:23
10. Blomberg and Robinson, 177.
11. Ibid., 178.
12. *Gospel Principles* (Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), p. 19.

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“You Anti-Mormons Haven’t Come Up with Anything New Since 1830”

I was briefly looking over your site. I find it amusing when I have nothing else to do to see if you anti-Mormons have come up with anything new since 1830. It appears you have not. For members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints like myself, we indulge in the challenge of finding answers to such shortsighted claims as are found on your site. To help in these boring times I would ask for something different. To start out if you would quit using phrases like “orthodox christians”, and “historic christianity”, it would first eliminate a great deal of confusion for those whom you would blind by your craftiness. After all what does it matter if people believed something for thousands of years. If it is wrong it will always be so. Thus, just because “orthodox christians” believed in the trinity for hundreds of years that doesn’t make it any more true than when it was spawned by uninspired men. This will force your mind to think of new lies to tell people as you divert them from the Spirit of Truth. However I’m sure you will misconstrue and misrepresent my words. But at least you will know that you had to shade the truth to advance your own cause.

Thanks for reading the article on Mormon Doctrine of God. It is difficult to take your response seriously since you are simply making personal attacks, which involve name-calling and cynical remarks. This hardly represents the attitude the Bible teaches believers to have. 1 Peter 3:15 states, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you the hope you have, but do this with gentleness and reverence.” I see none of that displayed in your remarks here. Your conduct and attitude says a great

deal about your religious faith. I hope this is not typical of the attitude of the Mormon Church. A biblical critique of my article on a more scholarly level would be more profitable. Not only a biblical critique of my work but also a biblical defense of your position leaving out the sarcasm and personal insults would be very profitable for all parties. Until then, I cannot take your comments seriously.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

Character of the Cults: A Christian Perspective

Written by Patrick Zukeran

Dr. Zukeran compares the beliefs of several modern cults against a conservative biblical worldview. This analysis makes it readily apparent that cults are not representing a scriptural view of true Christianity.

Challenge of the Cults

This church is growing so rapidly, sociologist Rodney Stark predicts that by the year 2080, it will become the most important world religion to emerge since the rise of Islam.{1} What church is Dr. Stark describing? It is not a Christian church but the Mormon Church, an organization labeled as a cult. The rise of the Mormon Church represents the growing challenge facing the church, the kingdom of the cults.

What is a cult? The greatest authority on the cults, the late Dr. Walter Martin, described a cult as "A group of people

gathered around a specific person's misinterpretation of the Bible."{2} Cults are groups that claim to be in harmony with Christianity but deny foundational Christian doctrines such as the Trinity or the unique deity of Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 7:15-17, Jesus gives us a warning about the coming of the cults. He states, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." What Jesus was warning was that cultists will look, act, and sound like Christians. However, that is only in external appearance. One can parade as a true believer for a time, but eventually one's words, actions, and especially one's beliefs—their "fruit"—will give one away as a counterfeit.

The growth of the cults can be attributed to several factors. First, it is a fulfillment of the warning given by Jesus and the apostles. In Matthew 24:23-26, Jesus warns us that as His return draws near, there will be an increase in false prophets who will ensnare many in their false teachings. In 2 Peter 2:1-3, Peter warns us that false teachers will arise from within the church.

The second factor in the growth of the cults is the breakdown of the family. Cults provide the family atmosphere many from broken homes long for; the cult leader often takes the place of a father figure.

Finally, we can attribute the growth of the cults to the failure of the church. As my mentor repeatedly stated, "The cults are the unpaid bills of the church." The cults thrive because Christians are lacking in biblical and theological understanding. Dr. Martin stated, "The rise of the cults is directly proportional to the fluctuating emphasis which the church has placed on the teachings of biblical doctrine to Christian laymen. To be sure, few pastors, teachers, and evangelists defend adequately their beliefs, but most of them – and most of the average Christian laymen – are hard put to

confront and refute a well-trained cultist of almost any variety."{3} If the church engaged in solid and in-depth Bible teaching, the cults would not flourish as they do today.

Doctrinal Character of the Cults

How do you know if a religious group is a cult? Jesus said that you will know false prophets by their fruits. In stating this he was not only speaking of their words and actions but of their doctrinal beliefs as well. Cults deviate from biblical Christianity in several key areas of doctrine.

Cults promote false teaching on the nature of God. The Bible teaches there is one God revealed in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The central feature that distinguishes cults from biblical Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. All cults have a distorted view of this doctrine. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses condemn the doctrine of the Trinity, and Mormons teach tritheism, three gods who make up the godhead.

Second, cults teach a false view of Jesus. The Bible teaches that Christ is 100 percent man and 100 percent God. This has been called the *hypostatic union*. In 2 Corinthians 11:4, Paul warned about false teachers teaching another Jesus. A modern-day example of false teaching is Christian Science which teaches that Jesus was not God but a man who displayed the Christ idea. He neither died for sins, nor was He resurrected.

Third is a false teaching on salvation. All cults have a works-oriented Gospel. The death of Christ is believed to give followers the *potential* to be saved. So after believing in Christ, one must serve the organization to attain salvation. Salvation is found in the organization and one is never really sure if one has done enough to be worthy of salvation. In the International Church of Christ, for example, disciples are scrutinized by their discipler daily to determine if they performed as worthy disciples. Failure to meet the standards

may result in discipline. Disciples can never be certain they have done enough for salvation.

Fourth, there is extra-biblical revelation and the denial of the sole authority of the Bible. Cults claim that extra revelation is given to the leader whose words are seen as inspired by God and equal to the Bible. If there is a conflict between the Bible and the leader's words, the latter takes precedence. So in reality, the leader's writings take precedence over the Bible. When interacting with cultists, I often hear them claim their teachings are consistent with the Bible. However, when I point out where their teachings deviate from the Bible, they eventually claim the Bible to be in error. In most cases, cultists claim the Bible has somehow been corrupted by the church.

Sociological Structure of the Cults

Not only do cults deviate doctrinally from biblical Christianity, they have distinctive sociological characteristics. The first is authoritarianism. The leader or organization exercises complete control over a follower's life. The words of the leadership are ultimate and often considered divinely inspired. Going against the leadership is equivalent to going against the commands of God.

The second characteristic is an elitist mentality. Most cults believe they are the true church and the only ones who will be saved. This is because the group believes they have new revelation or understanding that gives them superior standing.

Third is isolationism. Due to their elitist mentality, cultists believe those who do not agree with them are deceived or under the influence of Satan. Therefore, many feel their members must be protected from the outside world, and physical or psychological barriers are created. Members are prohibited from communicating with those outside the organization who do not agree with the teachings of the group.

Fourth, there is closed-mindedness and the discouragement of individual thinking. Because of its authoritarian nature, leaders are the only ones thought to be able to properly interpret the Bible. All members are to turn to the organization for biblical interpretation and advice on life decisions. Therefore, individual thinking and questioning is discouraged. There is an unwillingness to dialogue and consider other viewpoints.

Fifth is a legalistic lifestyle. As mentioned earlier, salvation is not based on grace; cults teach a works-oriented gospel. This leads to a lifestyle of legalism. Followers must live up to the group's standards in order to attain or maintain their membership and hope for eternal life. Followers are required to faithfully serve, and attend meetings, studies, and services. As a result, there is tremendous pressure to live up to the requirements of the organization.

Finally there is a difficult exit process. Since salvation is found in the organization, leaving the organization is considered by many to be leaving God. All former members who leave cults are shunned by members which often includes members of their own family. Many are warned that if they leave, they will be condemned to hell, or seduced by Satan. Many ex-members are harassed by the organization even after they leave. Exiting members often end up distrusting any religious organization and end up feeling isolated and alone.

Life in the cults is marked by fear of judgment, pressure, and legalism. This is a far cry from what we are taught in the Bible. Jesus and the apostles taught that the new life in Christ is one of grace, love, and freedom from the law. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." The peace and rest promised by Christ is seldom experienced by those in the cults.

Cultic Methodology

When you receive a knock on your door in the mornings, who do you assume it to be? A salesman? A Girl Scout selling cookies? For many of us, we assume it to be a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon missionary looking to tell us about his or her organization. One of the reasons cults have grown is their methodology.

The methods cults use to win converts are moral deception, aggressive proselytizing, and Scripture twisting. By moral deception I mean cults use Christian terminology to win converts. For example, New Agers use the term *born again* to support reincarnation. Mormons use terms like the *Trinity* and *salvation by grace* but these terms have different meanings than what the Bible teaches. Therefore, many untrained Christians are deceived into believing these groups are actually Christian.

Aggressive proselytizing is another method of the cults. Although many Christian groups use aggressive evangelism, they do so out of a love for God and a desire to see others come to know Christ. Many cultists proselytize for much the same reasons but added to this is the desire to win God's approval. They work *for* grace rather than *from* grace. The cults require their members to evangelize. Many groups hold their members accountable for the number of hours they spend witnessing for the organization. Many members feel guilty if a day or so goes by without them proselytizing.

Scripture twisting is another method of the cults. Cultist quote verses in the Bible that support their position, but skip over the verses that do not. Often, there is gross misinterpretation of Scripture so that contradictory verses will better fall in line with their views.

For example, Jehovah's Witness and Mormons try to use verses to show Jesus is a created being. However, their position is

easily shown to be incorrect when you explain the context and correct meaning of the terms. Also, when you show additional verses that contradict their position, they are often surprised and realize they have never seen those verse before or that the organization's explanations of those verses are unable to be supported.

To successfully engage in conversation and effectively witness to those in the cults, Christians must be prepared in the following ways. First Peter 3:15 states that we must always be "prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." We must be prepared by knowing the word of God through diligent study of it. Second, we must be prepared to overcome our fears and lovingly reach out to cult members, exercising the fruits of patience and gentleness as we share the truth.

Danger of the Cults

The rise of the cults pose a serious challenge to the church because they present several dangers to the church and families involved. First, there is a spiritual danger. First Timothy 4:1 states "…that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." Ultimately the spirit behind all lies and deception is the devil, so the ultimate force behind the cults is the evil one.

Galatians 1:8 states, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other that than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned." The false gospel of the cults cannot lead anyone to salvation. There are eternal consequences for false beliefs. For this reason Jesus and the apostles are very harsh on false teachers.

There is also a psychological danger. The mind controlling

techniques used by the organizations can cause immense damage mentally and emotionally. Living under the pressure, guilt, and dependence on the organization has proven to have tremendous negative effects on individuals.

Third, there is domestic danger. Individuals are taught that loyalty to the organization is equivalent to allegiance with God. Therefore, loyalty to the organization supercedes loyalty to family. Thus, if a family member begins conducting himself in a way the organization does not approve of, the cult will often separate the family from the individual member. Isolation can be emotional or physical. Numerous families have been separated as a result.

In some cases there is a physical danger. The teachings of David Koresh cost the Branch Davidians their lives. Hobart Freeman taught that believers did not need medicine for illnesses, and told his followers to throw all theirs away. As a result, he and fifty-two of his members died from curable conditions.

In light of this threat, what are Christians called to do? First, we are called to study and know the Word of God. Paul writes to Timothy and all saints saying, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” Christians should master the Bible so that they will not be deceived by any false teaching. Second, Titus commands us to be able to confront and refute false teachers. Finally, in Acts 20, Paul exhorts the leaders of the church to protect their flock from the false teachers that will prey upon the sheep. Every Christian is called to know the truth so well they can confront false teaching, and protect their church and family from it.

Notes

1. Richard Ostling, *Mormon America* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper Collins Publishing Inc. 1999), p. XVI.

2. Walter Martin & Hank Hannegraph, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis, Mich.: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), p. 17.

3. Norman Geisler, *When Cultists Ask* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), p. 15.

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3. Oslting, Richard & Joan. *Mormon America*. San Francisco, Cal.: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

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“Salvation Is By Grace, But We Have to Do Our Part”

Sue,

Thank you for being one who stands up for the principles that our Savior Jesus Christ taught. I applaud your efforts. I have a couple of questions from your article:

I read your “A Short Look at Six World Religions” and it said that many of Joseph Smith’s prophecies never came true. Which prophecies are those?

I also read, “Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God’s grace.” I have been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 8 years of age, and I have always been taught that we are saved by the grace of God. However, salvation is not free. For example, if one chooses to not live the commandments that God has given, then how can he be worthy to live in the presence of God? Here is a quote from the Book of Mormon: “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all that we can do.” (page 99-100). Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins, but we must do our part to accept his atonement and live his commandments. Accepting his atonement is not enough. Through the grace of our loving Savior we can be redeemed from our sins and return to the presence of our Heavenly Father clean from all sin, again if we keep his commandments the best we know how. God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are the perfect examples of mercy.

Have a good day and thank you for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is my best friend.

Hello _____,

Jesus is my best friend too! <smile>

> *I read your article "A Short Look at Six World Religions" and it said that many of Joseph Smith's prophecies never came true. Which prophecies are those?*

I cited a few of them in another response to an e-mail about my article. Your question prompted me to add a link to that article at the end of the one you read, but here's a direct link for you..

> *I also read, "Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace." I have been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 8 years of age, and I have always been taught that we are saved by the grace of God. However, salvation is not free.*

I would agree that salvation was not free for God, for whom it cost Him EVERYTHING. But it *is* a free gift for us. Please note Ephesians 2:8,9:

> "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

This scripture is diametrically opposed to Mormon doctrine. We cannot do anything to contribute to our salvation. Isaiah 64:6 says that all our righteousness is as filthy rags; what can we possibly give to God that will overcome the heinous sin of requiring the death of His Son to be reconciled to Him? If someone came in here and murdered one of my sons and then said, "Hey, I don't want you to be mad at me. . . let me do something to help me get myself in your good graces. Here's a nickel. . ." —Well, guess what? That wouldn't work! And it doesn't work with God either.

The question of obeying His commandments is a separate issue. Obedience for the person who has put his trust in Christ is a matter of bearing fruit and walking out the new kind of life

(new heart, new motivation, new source of power) that Christ brings at the point of salvation. Obedience for the person who has NOT put his trust in Christ, but is trusting in himself to earn heaven on his own merit, counts for nothing because Jesus said, “Apart from Me, no one comes to the Father” (John 14:6). It would be like that person who murdered my sons saying, “But I’m keeping all the Bohlin family rules! I’m respectful to the parents, I take out the garbage on garbage day, I put my dishes in the dishwasher, I don’t let the dog sleep on the bed! I deserve to be a member of your family!” See how that doesn’t work either?

_____, I pray the Lord will open your eyes to see that trying to earn salvation with our paltry efforts—even WITH His grace—is a slap in the face of our God. He wants us to come to Him with empty hands and the realization that we do not deserve and cannot earn the gift of eternal life that comes ONLY through trusting in the Lord Jesus.

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

It occurred to me as I read your response that we aren’t exactly talking about the same definition of “salvation.” How exactly do you define it, in the strict sense? By that I mean, tell me what salvation is and what it is not, as you perceive it.

I am really impressed that you realize we’re defining our terms differently. I want to make sure you get the best possible answer, so I’m going to ask my Probe colleague Michael Gleghorn, who has formal theological training, to answer that question, OK?

Michael Gleghorn’s answer:

Hello _____,

Thanks for your e-mail. You ask a very important question. Indeed, entire books have been written on the subject. I will simply offer a broad sketch of some of the fundamentals of this important biblical doctrine.

In its broadest sense, the biblical doctrine of salvation is concerned with the idea of God's deliverance of His people from harm or danger. In the Old Testament, God's greatest saving act occurred when He delivered (or saved) His people Israel from their slavery in Egypt. This event is known as the Exodus. Thus, the biblical doctrine of salvation includes more than just "spiritual" deliverance, it can incorporate physical deliverance as well. The important point is that salvation, in the biblical sense, is ALWAYS THE WORK OF GOD—NOT MAN. Just listen to God's word to the prophet Isaiah: "I, even I, am the Lord; and there is no savior besides Me." (43:11).

This point cannot be emphasized enough—God is the One who saves. Even in the book of Judges, when Israel has many human "deliverers," it is God who appoints them and raises them up for their specific task. Thus, we repeatedly read statements such as the following in the book of Judges: "And when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, THE LORD RAISED UP A DELIVERER for the sons of Israel TO DELIVER THEM" (3:9; emphasis mine).

And the psalmist also wrote: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation. God is to us a God of deliverances; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (68:19-20). You get the idea.

The Old Testament Scriptures provide much of the "theological context" for the New Testament doctrine of God and salvation. While some things are certainly "new" and different (see John 1:17, etc.), much remains the same. In particular, salvation is still viewed as THE WORK OF GOD—NOT MAN. Think back to the end of Psalm 68:20: "to God the Lord belong escapes from death." Now listen to Paul in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of

sin is death, BUT THE FREE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD" (emphasis mine).

In the New Testament, as in the Old, God is the only true savior of man. This salvation has been made available through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS according to the Scriptures" (emphasis mine). Furthermore, Christ is the ONLY way of salvation. As Peter said in Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is NO OTHER NAME under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (emphasis mine).

Of course, if God is the ONLY savior and, as Jesus Himself said, "No one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6), clearly Jesus must be God. This is the teaching of the New Testament (see John 1:1-3, 14). It's important to point out, however, that Jesus is NOT God the Father; He is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. Of course Jesus is also a Man. (Although I cannot get into it right now, Mormons and Christians not only have a different understanding of the doctrine of salvation, we also have radically different conceptions of God. Pat Zukeran, a colleague of mine at Probe, has recently written an article on "The Mormon Doctrine of God."

The Bible claims that Jesus is the only savior, who died on the cross for our sins. But Christ's death is not merely a means of salvation from sin (as great as that would be in itself), it also makes available to man the perfect righteousness of God! Thus we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Salvation not only includes the forgiveness of our debt of sin, it also includes the crediting of Christ's righteousness to our account! In other words, Christ washes away the stain of our sin and clothes us in His perfect righteousness. Luther

called this “The Great Exchange.”

But how does this Great Exchange take place? By what means does it occur? What must one do to be saved? That was the question asked of Paul and Silas by the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30. Paul and Silas responded by saying, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved” (16:31). In other words, the jailer was told to BELIEVE (i.e. put his faith or trust) in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gift of salvation, like all gifts, must be received. It is received by faith alone. It is with this understanding that we must read Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that NOT OF YOURSELVES, it is the gift of God; NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS, that no one should boast” (emphasis mine). And again, in Titus 3:4-7 we read: “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, NOT ON THE BASIS OF DEEDS WHICH WE HAVE DONE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (emphasis mine). Other aspects of salvation include, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO, justification (i.e. being declared righteous by God), adoption into God’s family as His beloved children (Galatians 4:4-7), the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14), and the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23). Man receives all that is included in God’s gift of salvation BY FAITH ALONE—PLUS NOTHING!

But do works play no role at all in the doctrine of salvation? Actually, they do! HOWEVER, WORKS ARE NOT A MEANS OF SALVATION! Rather, good works are a RESULT of salvation. Salvation is a gift of God, received by faith alone—plus nothing! But one of the RESULTS of a genuine salvation experience is that the believer engages in good works. We recently looked at Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:4-7. But what

comes after these verses? In Ephesians 2:10 we read: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Notice the progression of ideas in Ephesians 2:8-10. We are saved by grace through faith and not by our works. However, we were saved, in part, FOR good works! I’ll let you look at Titus 3:8 on your own, but the same order of ideas is present there as well.

By the way, this is James’ point as well in James 2:14-26. Some people think that this passage in James contradicts Paul’s doctrine of salvation by grace, through faith—plus nothing. But if we read this passage carefully, it is clear that James is not arguing that we are saved by works. Rather, he is making the very important point that GENUINE faith produces good works. Thus, if no good works are evident, it may be because the alleged faith is not genuine. And of course no one is claiming that a “pseudo-faith” can save; the faith that saves is GENUINE faith—and such faith leads inevitably to good works.

Two final points. First, we are not capable of judging the thoughts and intentions of others. Only God can do that. If someone does not appear TO ME to be engaging in good works, this is no proof that they are not truly saved. Only God knows their heart. However, it might be appropriate to ask that person to examine himself to see whether his faith is really genuine or not (see 2 Corinthians 13:5 for instance). Second, even the good works resulting from the genuine faith of a true believer are not really his own (in the sense that they originate and are carried out solely in his own strength). They also are the gift of God and can only be properly carried out in the power of God’s Spirit—NOT in the strength of the believer’s flesh! Although many verses could be quoted to this effect, I will mention only two, Romans 8:3-4: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, GOD DID: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an

offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (emphasis mine).

Please allow me to summarize the main points:

- Salvation is the work of God—not man.
- God offers man salvation as a free gift, based on the substitutionary death of His Son for our sins.
- Salvation includes, but is not limited to, such things as the forgiveness of sins, the crediting of Christ's righteousness to our account, justification (being declared righteous by God), adoption into God's family as His beloved children, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of eternal life.
- Man receives God's salvation by faith alone—plus nothing.
- The object of our faith is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Good works do not merit salvation, but genuine salvation results in good works.
- Good works are only "good" to the extent that they are done in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God Himself is ultimately the Author even of the good works which follow a genuine salvation experience.

I hope this helps. I also hope it makes sense. These ideas are some of the most essential elements of the biblical doctrine of salvation; they do not, of course, exhaust the subject. If the Bible is the word of God, we must pay very careful attention to the means by which God has made His salvation available to us—neither adding to it, nor subtracting from it, but teaching it just as God revealed it to us.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Your Comments About Mormonism Are Nonsense”

I have read your statements in your article A Short Look at Six World Religions. I happen to be Mormon and have heard this nonsense before:

“Mormonism is not Christian because it denies some of the essential doctrines of Christianity, including the deity of Christ, salvation by grace, and the bodily resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, Mormon doctrine contradicts the Christian teaching that there is only one God, and it undermines the authority and reliability of the Bible”

1. We never have denied the deity of Christ. Christ is Jehovah, the great I am. This is within our doctrine.

2. We are saved by grace. No doubt about it. It’s part of our doctrine.

3. We have always taught that Jesus took his body the third day the same as it is recorded in the Bible. I don’t know where you received your info on that, but we never have denied the resurrection of Christ. In fact when serving my mission it was common for other Christian groups to say that Christ is only a spirit. We had to teach them that Christ in reality took his body the third day.

4. We believe that there is one Godhead. We believe in one

Elohim.

5. “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” Joseph Smith.

Christ taught that we should not judge. It seems to me that many so called “Christians” judge other Christians who don’t believe as they do. Let the Lord do the judging.

Thank you for responding to my article. I don’t know if you will be able to receive what I have to say, since the Mormon use of Biblical terms seems to differ from what the rest of us mean by it, but I will attempt to respond to your argument.

> *1. We never have denied the deity of Christ. Christ is Jehovah, the great I am. This is within our doctrine.*

When orthodox Christians say “deity of Christ,” we mean that He is one with the Father. There is one God of the Bible, although He exists as three persons, and Jesus is—and has always been—as fully God as the Father. As I understand it, Mormon doctrine is that Jesus was a created being, which would put Him on a different—inferior—level to the eternally-existing Father. So the Father existed before Jesus did, which would make Him (Jesus) less than the eternally-existing Creator of the Universe. Which the Bible proclaims that He is:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)

“In Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).

Of Jesus it was announced: “These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again” (Revelation 2:8); the same claim made by God Almighty: “This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD

Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). Also, compare Revelation 22:13 with Isaiah 48:12.

Also as I understand it, Mormon doctrine is that Jesus is Jehovah, and the Father is Elohim, and they are different Gods. But in the Old Testament, these are two names for the same, one, God.

James Talmage, one of the Mormon authorities, states: "This [the Trinity] cannot rationally be construed to mean that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are one in substance and person" (*A Study of the Articles of Faith*, p.40).

James Talmage states: "Jesus Christ was Jehovah…Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of scripture, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was Jehovah…The Father has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol.1, p.11,27).

Joseph F. Smith stated, "Among the spirit children of Elohim, the first-born was and is Jehovah, or Jesus Christ, to whom all others are juniors" (*Gospel Doctrine*, p.70).

In contrast, the Bible uses the names Elohim and Jehovah interchangeably for the one true God. The English form "Jehovah" was developed from four consonants (YHWH) from which we get the word "Yahweh," translated "LORD." The words "Yahweh" and "Elohim" are used together hundreds of times, as in: 'LORD our God', 'LORD my God', 'LORD his God', 'LORD your God'. For example: "The Lord [Jehovah] our God [Elohim] is one Lord [Jehovah]" (Deuteronomy 6:4). See also Genesis 2:4-22; Deuteronomy 4:1; Judges 5:3; 1 Samuel 2:30; Isaiah 44:6.

> *2. We are saved by grace. No doubt about it. It's part of our doctrine.*

The Bible's definition of grace is undeserved, unearned favor.

It’s a gift from God with no strings attached and no way to earn it. Apparently the Mormon definition of grace is very different, including man’s efforts:

The LDS Third Article of Faith states: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, *by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel*” (*Pearl of Great Price: Articles of Faith*). (emphasis mine)

Joseph Fielding Smith explains what that last phrase means: “that which man merits through his own acts through life and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p.134).

James Talmage explains: “…redemption from personal sins can only be obtained through obedience to the requirement of the Gospel, and a life of good works” (James Talmage, in *A Study of the Articles of Faith*).

In the Bible ‘salvation’ means deliverance from the consequence (eternal separation from God) of our sin. As I understand it, Mormon leaders have redefined the word “salvation” to have a two-fold meaning: a) forgiveness of sins and b) universal resurrection:

“There will be a General Salvation for all in the sense in which that term is generally used, but salvation, meaning resurrection, is not exaltation” (Stephen L. Richards, *Contributions of Joseph Smith*, LDS tract, p.5).

“All men are saved by grace alone without any act on their part, meaning they are resurrected” (Bruce McConkie, *What Mormons Think of Christ*“, LDS tract, p.28).

> *3. We have always taught that Jesus took his body the third day the same as it is recorded in the Bible. I don’t know where you received your info on that, but we never have denied the resurrection of Christ. In fact when serving my mission it was common for other Christian groups to say that*

> *Christ is only a spirit. We had to teach them that Christ in reality took his body the third day.*

Upon doing further research, I was able to ascertain that I was wrong in saying that Mormon doctrine denies the bodily resurrection of Christ. I apologize and I have removed that part of my article.

> *4. We believe that there is one Godhead. We believe in one Elohim.*

Orthodox Christianity teaches that there is one God. Period. The Godhead consists of one God in three persons, not three Gods. Not a plurality of Gods.

Bruce McConkie states: "Three 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, *these three are the only Gods we worship*" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p.576-7). (emphasis mine)

> *5. "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Joseph Smith.*

How do you know when the Bible has been translated correctly? There are thousands of manuscripts in existence that allow us to check the reliability of the Biblical documents. The Bible was written in human language, which we can easily check because of the existence of so much collateral literature in the same language, unlike the Book of Mormon, supposedly written on golden plates in angelic language. Where is the fallibility test for that book?

> *Christ taught that we should not judge. It seems to me that many so called "Christians" judge other Christians who don't believe as they do. Let the Lord do the judging.*

In the very same chapter as the "Judge not" verse, the Lord

also says, “Beware of false prophets.” How else will we distinguish between true and false except by judging the words and behavior of what men say? Of course, we cannot judge another’s heart, which explains His command not to judge; but in order to be discerning about truth and deception, we MUST judge their fruit by comparing it to the only absolute we have, the Bible.

The Bible’s standard for a prophet is 100% accuracy. By that standard, Joseph Smith is a false prophet. If he were a true prophet,

- Jesus would have returned in 1891 (*Documentary History of the Church* (DHC) 2:182)
- The Civil War would have poured out upon all nations (D&C 87:1-3), the wicked of Smith’s generation would have been “swept from off the face of the land” (DHC 1:315)
- A temple would have been built in Independence Missouri by the generation living in 1832 (D&C 84:4,5)

I’m sorry, but the differences between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity are not “nonsense.” They are significant, and need to be explored.

Respectfully,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

A Short Look at Six World

Religions – Understand the Beliefs of Non-Christians

An overview of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses from a conservative Christian perspective.

Islam

There are three monotheistic religions in the world, religions that teach that there is only one God: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The term "Islam" means "submission" to the will of God, and the person who submits is called a "Muslim."

The founder of Islam is Muhammad, who was born in 570 A.D. At age 40 he claimed to begin receiving revelations from a spirit being he believed was the angel Gabriel. These later were recorded and became the Qur'an, Islam's holy book.

There are Six Articles of Faith that all Muslims hold to. The first is that "there is no God but Allah." The second Article of Faith is belief in a hierarchy of angels, of which the archangel Gabriel is the highest. Each Muslim is assigned two angels, one to record his good deeds and the other to record the bad deeds. At the bottom of the angelic hierarchy are the jinn, from which we get the word "genie." They are a Muslim version of demons.

The third Article of Faith is belief in 104 holy books, with the Koran as the final revelation. The fourth is belief in the prophets. According to the Qur'an, God has sent a prophet to every nation to preach the message that there is only one God. 124,000 prophets have been sent, most of them unknown but some of them biblical characters, including Jesus. Muhammed, though, is the prophet for all times, the "Seal of the

Prophets."

The fifth Article of Faith is belief in predestination. All things, both good and evil, are the direct result of the will of Allah. Islam is a very fatalistic religion.

The sixth Article of Faith is the day of judgment. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad will be rewarded with Paradise; those whose bad deeds outweigh their good will be judged to hell. Islam is a religion of human works. The Bible tells us, though, that we can never earn God's acceptance on the basis of our deeds.

There are Five Pillars of Islam, obligations every Muslim must keep. The first is reciting the creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger." The second is prayer: 17 cycles of prayer, spread out over five times of prayer each day. They must wash in a prescribed manner before they kneel down and face toward Mecca.

The third pillar is almsgiving, 2.5% of one's income for the poor. The fourth pillar is fasting during the lunar month of Ramadan. Muslims must forego food, water and sex during daylight hours. The fifth pillar is making the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.

Sometimes you will hear people say that Allah is another name for the God of the Bible. Is it the same? "Allah" is the Arabic name for God, and Arab Christians use the name Allah to describe the God of the Bible. Mohammed taught that there is one true God who is the same God that Jews and Christians ("the People of the Book") worship. He began Islam on the foundation of the God of the Bible. We can say that in principle, we worship the same God. Islam began on the foundation of belief in the one true God to combat the pagan polytheism of the area. However, Mohammed departed from this foundation, and we differ in our understanding of how God has fully revealed Himself. In the Qur'an, Allah is a distant

spiritual being, but Yahweh is a Father to His children. Allah does not love wrongdoers, but God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Allah has predetermined everything about life; the God of the Bible invites us to share our hearts with Him.

Hinduism

Hinduism may seem like an alien religion of people on the other side of the world, but it has infiltrated our culture in all sorts of ways. You're probably familiar with most of the basic Hindu concepts without even realizing it. Have you seen the *Star Wars* movies? They are filled with Hindu ideas. Ever watch *Dharma and Greg* on TV? "Dharma" is an important Hindu term for moral duty. 30% of Americans believe in reincarnation, which is a Hindu concept. Transcendental Meditation is thinly disguised Hinduism. George Harrison's song "My Sweet Lord" invokes a Hindu chant. New Age philosophy is Hinduism wrapped in Western garb.

Hinduism is tremendously diverse. It encompasses those who believe in one reality, Brahman, as well as those who believe in many gods—as many as 330 million! Some Hindus believe the universe is real; most believe it is illusion, or *maya.* (This world view isn't consistent with reality. You won't find Hindus meditating on railroad tracks, for instance.) Some believe Brahman and the universe are one; others see them as two distinct realities.

Despite the diversity within Hinduism, there are five major beliefs of this religion. The first is that ultimate reality, called Brahman, is an impersonal oneness. In *The Empire Strikes Back,* Yoda tells Luke that everything—the tree, the rock, etc.—is all part of "The Force." This is monism: the belief that all is one. Nothing is distinct and separate from anything else.

Another Hindu belief is that just as the air in an open jar is

identical to the air around the jar, we extend from and are one with Brahman. All is one, all is god—and that means that we are god. In her book and movie "Out on a Limb," Shirley MacLaine relates a time when she stood on a beach, embracing this concept and declaring, "I am god! I am god!" It's a very Hindu concept.

Humanity's primary problem, according to Hinduism, is that we have forgotten we are divine. The consequence is that we are subject to the Law of Karma, another important Hindu belief. This is the moral equivalent to the natural law of cause and effect. You always reap what you sow. There is no grace, there is no forgiveness, there is never any escape from consequences. It's a very heavy burden to carry. Not only that, but Hinduism says that the consequences of our choices, both bad karma and good karma, follow us from lifetime to lifetime. This is another Hindu concept: samsara, the ever-revolving wheel of life, death, and rebirth, also known as reincarnation. A person's karma determines the kind of body—whether human, animal, or insect—into which he or she is incarnated in the next lifetime.

The final major Hindu concept is liberation from the wheel of birth, death, and rebirth. One can only get off the reincarnation merry-go-round by realizing that the idea of the individual self is an illusion, and only the oneness of Brahman is real. There is no heaven, though—only losing one's identity in the universal oneness.

Praise God that through the Lord Jesus, Christianity offers hope, forgiveness, grace, and a personal relationship with a personal God in heaven. Jesus means there's a point to life.

Buddhism

Buddhism does not believe in a personal God. It does not have worship, prayer, or praise of a divine being. It offers no redemption, no forgiveness, no hope of heaven, and no final

judgment. Buddhism is more of a moral philosophy, an ethical way of life.

In his essay “De Futilitate,” C.S. Lewis called Buddhism “a heresy of Hinduism.” Buddhism was founded by a Hindu, Siddhartha Gautama, during the sixth century B.C. After being profoundly impacted by seeing four kinds of suffering in one day, Siddhartha committed himself to finding the source of suffering and how to eliminate it. One day he sat down under a fig tree and vowed not to rise again until he had attained enlightenment. After some time, he did so and became the Buddha, which means “enlightened one.” He started teaching the “The Four Noble Truths,” the most basic of Buddhist teachings.

The First Noble Truth is that life consists of suffering. The Second Noble Truth is that we suffer because we desire those things that are impermanent. This is absolutely central to Buddhism: the belief that desire is the cause of all suffering.

The Third Noble Truth is that the way to liberate oneself from suffering is by eliminating all desire. (Unfortunately, it’s a self-defeating premise: if you set a goal to eliminate desire, then you desire to eliminate desire.) The Fourth Noble Truth is that desire can be eliminated by following the Eight-Fold path.

In the Eight-Fold Path, the first two steps are foundational to all the others. Step one is Right Understanding, where one sees the universe as impermanent and illusory and believes that the individual does not actually exist. If you ever hear someone say, “The world is an illusion, and so am I. I don’t really exist,” they’re probably exploring Buddhism. (You might want to pinch them and see what they do.) Right Thought means renouncing all attachment to the desires and thoughts of oneself, even as he recognizes that the self doesn’t exist.

Other parts of the Eight-Fold path are Right Speech, Right

Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Meditation. Ethical conduct is very important in Buddhism. There are commands to refrain from the taking of any life (that includes ants and roaches in your house), stealing, immorality, lying, and drinking.

The Eight-Fold Path is a set of steps that describe not only a good life but one which will move the follower toward Nirvana, the goal of Buddhism. Nirvana is not heaven; it is a state of extinction, where one's essence—which does not actually exist in the first place—is extinguished like a candle flame, marking the end of desire and thus the end of suffering.

One of the important concepts in Buddhism is samsara, a cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It differs from the Hindu concept of reincarnation in that Buddhism teaches there is no self to continue from one life to the next. Another important concept is karma, the belief that you reap what you sow, and your karma follows you through the cycles of samsara. Note the inherent inconsistency here: there is no self to continue from one life to the next, but one's karma does?!

Buddhism says there are many paths to the top of the mountain, so there are many ways to God. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."

Judaism

Both Christianity and Judaism have their roots in Old Testament faith. But Christianity is really a sister, rather than a daughter, to Judaism, which is the religion developed by rabbis from 200 B.C. on.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., that spelled the end of sacrifices and the priesthood. Instead of being guided by prophets, priests and kings, the Jewish people turned to rabbis as their authorities on matters of laws and practice.

There was basically one kind of Judaism until the eighteenth century when the Age of Enlightenment swept through Europe. That's when the three major branches of Judaism arose.

That one basic kind of Judaism is what is now called "Orthodox Judaism." It has a strong emphasis on tradition and strict observance of the Law of Moses.

Reform Judaism began in Germany at the time of the Enlightenment. Reform Judaism is the humanistic branch. In fact, there are many Reform Jews who don't believe in God at all. For them, Judaism is a way of life and culture with a connection to one's ancestors that is about legacy, not faith.

The middle-ground branch, seeking to find moderate ground between the two extremes of the Orthodox and Reform branches, is Conservative Judaism.

If there is any religious principle that Judaism explicitly affirms and teaches, it is the unity of God. You may have heard of the *Shema*, found in Deuteronomy 6:4¾"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." This one all-important principle is the reason so many Jewish people have a hard time understanding Christianity, which they see as a religion of three gods, not one God in three Persons.

The Old Testament is the Scripture of Judaism. Many Jews, though, do not consider the Old Testament to be the Word of God or inspired, although they do give it respect as a part of Jewish tradition and history.

There are some lifestyle practices that set people apart as distinctively Jewish. Traditional Jews, usually Orthodox but including some from other branches, observe the Sabbath. This means abstaining from work, driving, and lighting a fire from Friday night to Saturday night. Orthodox Jews also keep kosher, which means keeping the Old Testament dietary laws. The most well known is the prohibition against mixing meat and milk at the same meal, although many people are also aware

that most Jewish people do not eat pork or shellfish.

It is difficult for Jewish people to place their faith in Jesus as Messiah because it is not considered a Jewish thing to do. In fact, they see “Jewish Christian” as an oxymoron. For many, being Jewish equals “Not Christian.” But there’s another big reason it is so hard for Jewish people to come to faith in Christ. They don’t see a need for “salvation,” because there is nothing to be saved from. If there is a God, then Jewish people already have a special relationship with Him as His chosen people. Jesus is superfluous for Jews.

If you know someone who is Jewish, pray that God will cause the scales to fall from the eyes of their heart and they will see the truth: that there’s nothing more Jewish or more godly than submitting in faith to one who was, and is, the very Son of God, and who proved His love for them by dying in their place on the cross.

Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses

Have you ever answered your door to find a couple of nicely-dressed people asking to talk to you about spiritual things? Chances are they were either Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses. Since both groups send many missionaries not only into American homes but to foreign countries, it makes sense to cover them in a discussion of world religions.

Many people think of Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses as Christians in slightly different denominations, but this is not the case. To put it bluntly, both religions teach another gospel and another Jesus. They are cults, not Christian denominations.

Mormonism was founded by Joseph Smith, a teenage boy in New York. He claimed that he was visited by first God the Father and the Son, and then by the angel Moroni, who gave him golden plates, which he translated into the Book of Mormon. He said

that Christianity had been corrupted since the death of the last apostle, and God appointed him to restore the truth. But Joseph Smith provided nine different versions of these events, which set the tone for the rest of his teachings.

Deuteronomy 18:22 gives God's standards for His prophets: 100% accuracy. Joseph Smith wrote a lot of prophecies, many of which never came true. He was a false prophet, and the religion he founded is not from God.

Mormonism is not Christian because it denies some of the essential doctrines of Christianity, including the deity of Christ and salvation by grace. Furthermore, Mormon doctrine contradicts the Christian teaching that there is only one God, and it undermines the authority and reliability of the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses was founded by Charles Taze Russell, another false prophet. His Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has produced a prodigious amount of literature. It has prophesied the return of Christ in 1914, 1925, and 1975. Again, by God's standards, the representatives of the Watchtower Society are false prophets.

Jehovah's Witnesses deny the basics of the Christian faith. They deny the Trinity. They believe there is one singular God, Jehovah. Jesus is actually the created being Michael the Archangel, and who became flesh at the incarnation. The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire. They deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. Like Mormons, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment.

Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace. And they teach that salvation is only found in their organizations.

What do you do if they come to your door? First, don't do anything without sending up a prayer of dependence on God. If you are not well-grounded in your own beliefs, unless you know

not only what you believe but why it’s true, then you should probably politely refuse to talk to them, and work on your own understanding of your faith. Both Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are very successful at drawing in church-goers who can’t recognize false teaching because they don’t know what’s true.

If you do know the Bible and what you believe, then prayerfully and humbly answer their questions and comments by showing them what the Bible says. And pray that God’s Spirit will show them the truth. He is grieved that people for whom Jesus died are so deceived.

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Embraced by the Light of Deception – A Christian Critique

Former Probe staffer Russ Wise shows that Betty Eadie’s best-selling book Embraced by the Light *is a combination of biblical images and spiritual deception.*

The Popularity of Betty Eadie’s Book

A growing number of Christians are embracing the light of Betty Eadie, the author of ***Embraced by the Light*****.** Ms. Eadie’s book, along with several other new-age bestsellers, are influencing the Christian church in a negative way.

The bestseller, *Embraced by the Light*, is one that needs to be

dealt with. It has been on the *New York Times* Bestseller List for over a year now and has sold more than two million copies thus far.

Betty Eadie is a woman on a mission and her mission is to introduce the "Jesus" she met in her near-death experience to as many people as she can. She has been on a variety of national television programs and hundreds of local programs. According to her publicist she has spoken in a significant number of churches, and Christians make up a large portion of those who purchase the book. That is scary.

Ms. Eadie has become somewhat of a guru for many. When she was in Dallas in February, 1994, the *Dallas Morning News* carried a lead story expressing the adoration of her new-found followers. One woman said that Ms. Eadie gave her a kind of inner peace and that without it she would have lost her mind. Another woman said that she cried all the way through the book the first time she read it. A man said that the book validated a lot of things he had believed and that he now looks at things differently.

According to the *Dallas Morning News* article the book's greatest appeal "stems from the description of eternal life, a comforting notion for people who have survived a loved one or for those pondering their own fate."

The popularity of Betty Eadie and her book *Embraced by the Light* in Christians' lives raises some important questions for us to ask ourselves. Why is her message so readily accepted by Christians? How has the church failed in its mission, thereby creating an atmosphere where such heresy could flourish?

Ms. Eadie says that she was shown in the spirit world that we were with God in the beginning and that we helped him to create the earth. She tells us that Eve's "initiative" made it possible for mankind to have children, that sin is not our true nature, and that we are inherently divine.

She continues by saying that we are all God's children and that we are here on earth to learn the lessons we need for our own spiritual evolution. Our key lesson is to remember our divinity and return to heaven. Eadie embraces the idea that all religions and faiths are equal in God's sight and that they are essential in our development. Likewise, spirits from the other side will also help us learn the lessons of life and aid in our progress.

Ms. Eadie says that death is a spiritual "rebirth" as we simply make a "transition" to another state of being. There will be no judgement day and we will judge ourselves regarding our spiritual evolution.

Mormonism and Magic

She also teaches that we choose the illnesses that we would suffer and that some would choose the illness that would end their lives. She further teaches that hell is not forever and that because of "love," in the end, all will be saved.

Before we can fully understand Ms. Eadie's worldview and theology it is important for us to recognize that she is a Mormon and has been exposed to new age paganism. She has, in fact, been a member in good standing of the Mormon Church for the past fifteen years or more.

Betty Eadie's background is a mixture of native American Indian spirituality, Catholicism, and Mormonism. Her mother was a full- blooded Sioux Indian and as a young child Betty attended a Catholic boarding school.

This spiritual syncretism helps us recognize the source of her close encounter with "the Light." As we take a closer look at her new-found belief system we are able to not only see Mormon ideas but beliefs that are found in the occult.

On page 57 of her book Betty tells the reader, "within our universe are both positive and negative energies, and both

types of energies are essential to creation and growth. These energies have intelligence—they do our will. They are willing servants."

You may remember "The Force" of *Star Wars* and its "light" and "dark" side. The Force was both "good" and "evil." One simply chose which side of "The Force" one wanted to utilize for his evolutionary development. There was no "right" or "wrong" choice; it was a matter of personal preference.

The Force is similar to "magic." In the occult world magic has a "good" side and an "evil" side. It is also considered to have a "light" side and a "dark" side.

Magic is an attempt by man to gain equality with God. To become a part of the creative process. God spoke the universe into existence by His word. The magician, sorcerer, or witch attempts to speak things into existence by words based on their occult knowledge.

The Christian desires to obey the will of God, not to force God to do his bidding. This is the essential difference between occult practice, magic, and Christianity.

Another example of Ms. Eadie's new age belief is the account of her being in a garden while she had her out-of-body experience (OBE). She saw a rose and was struck by its beauty and as she looked at it she felt that she had become "one" with it. She states on page 81 of her book, "I felt God in the plant, in me, his love pouring into us. We were all one!"

"At-one-ment" or the interconnectedness of all things is a primary tenet of new age thought and philosophy. Betty Eadie, through her OBE, experienced the greatest deception Lucifer plays on humanity—that we are a part of the divine, that we are indeed deity. The idea that we are divine beings opens our understanding that we have all that we need "within" us to progress toward our full potential as a god or goddess.

Our “looking” or “going” within is an attempt to discover our inner allies and gain “deep” learning so we further evolve mentally and spiritually. These allies or inner teachers, helpers, or guides are available to all of us, according to the new age mystics.

This inner teacher is also known as the “Higher Self” or the “True Self” and is in constant battle with our cognitive or conscious self. The focus of knowledge is transferred from the objective and cognitive to the subjective and intuitive or experiential. *It is my contention that the greatest danger Betty Eadie represents for the Christian is that Truth is based on or in* experience *rather than the Word of God.*

Betty Eadie’s View of Jesus

Ms. Eadie believes that the “Jesus” she met during her OBE was the “real” word of God and not a book that has been corrupted over the millennia. Perhaps some of the most disturbing aspects of her book is what is left out rather than the deception within.

Betty Eadie never mentions the crucifixion or the atonement for sin. In her worldview they simply are not needed. According to her belief we are at-one with God. Likewise, she never mentions the cross of Christ; evidently her “Jesus” is too positive to mention something as negative as the cross or the need of redemption.

There is no mention of evil or victory over sin. There is no resurrection. Ms. Eadie is almost evangelistic in her declaration that “all religions upon the earth are necessary because there are people who need what they teach. People in one religion may not have a complete understanding of the Lord’s gospel and never will have while in that religion.” (see Gal. 1:8 and 2 Cor. 11:13 along with Matt. 24:24)

Eadie continues by saying “as an individual raises his level

of understanding about God and his own eternal progress, he might feel disconnected with the teachings of his present church and seek a different philosophy or religion to fill that void. When this occurs he has reached another level of understanding and will long for further truth and knowledge."

She says, "Having received this knowledge, I knew that we have no right to criticize any church or religion in any way. They are all precious and important in his sight."

Another concern of Ms. Eadie's is her unbiblical teaching regarding the person of Jesus. On page 44 of her book Ms. Eadie recounts her meeting the Jesus of her out-of-body-experience:

> I understood that he was the Son of God, though he himself was also a God, and that he had chosen from before the creation of the world to be our Savior.

Ms. Eadie's statement regarding the person of Jesus is legitimate with the exception of one word that causes us to think of how the Jehovah Witnesses translate John 1:1. The article "a" becomes very important when it precedes "God." However, for Ms. Eadie the use of the article "a" indicates that she views Jesus as another distinct deity rather than the second person of a triune god—thereby exposing her Mormon understanding of the trinity. The Mormons believe in three separate beings who are each divine rather than three persons comprising one God as the Bible indicates.

The Bible is explicit in its affirmation of the Trinity. Deuteronomy 6:4 is clear in its declaration of one God. Elsewhere in Scripture we see God the Father (Matthew 6:9), God the Son (John 1:1), and God the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4) as three distinct Persons who are equal in every aspect of their being.

In John 10:30 Jesus says that He is one with the Father, thereby leaving no doubt of their oneness regarding their

essence and that they are not two separate beings or gods as Ms. Eadie would have us believe. Ms. Eadie refers to “the Spirit of God,” although she does not mention the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Trinity by name. The Bible, likewise, is clear regarding the stature of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26 the Holy Spirit is seen as the enabler in helping God’s people understand divine truth.

Betty Eadie’s view of Jesus comes into focus once Biblical light is shed upon it. It becomes perfectly clear that she does not hold a trinitarian view of God.

Deception of New Age Religion

The unsettling message that Betty Eadie offers in her book is that we are not sinners needing redemption, but that we are spiritual beings who have lost our way. We have forgotten our divinity. Spiritual growth is a progressive process toward self-realization and at-one-ment.

The new-age worldview of Betty Eadie is evident:

- All is One
- All is God
- Man is God
- All is changing
- Man is changing
- All is relative
- Self is the Judge
- The gospel is unnecessary

Ms. Eadie sounds like Shirley MacLaine, the popular new age entertainer and author, when she says that her prior existence “had been purposely blocked from me by a ‘veil’ of forgetfulness at my birth.” Ms. MacLaine had previously made the same statement in her popular book *Out on a Limb*.

In other words, we were with our heavenly Father in the spirit world and eventually came to the point where we were

spiritually dry and realized that the only way to get beyond our dryness was to jump start our spirituality. Thereby, we chose to leave our heavenly home and incarnate on this earth where we might further develop our spiritual essence and advance our possibilities in the spirit world.

Ms. Eadie states that prior to our leaving our spiritual home and incarnating in this world we perfected a plan for growth before we took on this physical shell. She says on page 47 of her book that "the Father explained that coming to earth for a time would further our spiritual growth. Each spirit who was to come to earth assisted in planning the conditions on earth, including the laws of mortality which would govern us."

In the spirit world Ms. Eadie was told "that we had all desired to come here, that we had actually chosen many of our weaknesses and difficult situations in our lives so that we could grow." She continues by saying, "to my surprise I saw that most of us had selected the illnesses we would suffer, and for some, the illness that would end our lives . . . we were very willing, even anxious, as spirits to accept all of our ailments, illnesses, and accidents here to help better ourselves spiritually."

According to Betty Eadie we are basically good. On page 49 of her book Ms. Eadie says "that sin is not our true nature. Spiritually, we are at various degrees of light—which is knowledge—and because of our divine spiritual nature we are filled with the desire to do good." She continues by saying "that there is a vital, dynamic link between the spirit world and mortality, and that we need the spirits on the other side for our progression."

In the above statement Ms. Eadie is allowing her god's eclectic worldview show. The idea that man is basically "good" is commonly held in the field of humanistic psychology rather than in Christian Scripture. The Bible indicates that man is in need of redemption and forgiveness. Her belief that we, in

the mortal world, are in need of the spirits from the other side to aid us in our spiritual progression is taken directly from her Mormon background. We find this teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants (128:15), one of the Standard Works of the Mormon Church.

The Biblical indication is that in the last days many will be deceived. The gospel writer of Matthew seems to agree. Not only will unbelievers be deceived but also those who have trusted Jesus for their salvation may be equally deceived. The Scripture says, “For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:36) The problem that many have in our day is that they seek “signs” and “wonders” rather than Jesus. Experience has become their teacher rather than the Word. Our response is simply, Jesus—the only begotten Son of God. There is salvation in no other. Our hope is not in our experiences, but in a person.

Testing the Book by The Bible

Betty Eadie exposes more of her Mormon worldview with her belief in a pre-mortal existence. When Ms. Eadie first speaks of “Jesus” in her book she said “I knew that I had known him from the beginning, from long before my earth life, because my spirit remembered him.” Another example of her “new found” belief in a pre-existence was when “Jesus” allowed her to recall her feelings when creation occurred. She says that “all people as spirits in the pre-mortal world took part in the creation of the earth.”

Ms. Eadie offers another example. She relates an experience during her heavenly visitation where she “traveled to many other worlds—earths like our own but more glorious, and always filled with loving, intelligent people.” She continues by saying, “I knew that I had been to these places before.” She had an experience that she could not deny.

Some have said that a man with an argument is always at the mercy of a man with an experience. A growing problem in our society is the willingness to accept one's experience over the protestation of the facts. As Christians we need to be careful that we do not fall into this trap. Our responsibility is to consider the Word of God and allow **it** to validate the experience or not. We must be extremely careful not to allow our or anyone else's experience to mold our belief system.

Another example of Ms. Eadie's pre-mortal experience was an encounter with those in the spirit world. She said, "I saw again the spirits who had not yet come to earth, and I saw some of them hovering over people in mortality. I saw one male spirit trying to get a mortal man and woman together on earth—his future parents." (I had a brief moment of *deja vu* and thought of Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*).

A growing number of Christians are accepting Ms. Eadie's account of the after-life, and the church is allowing her beliefs to take root by their lack of biblical teaching. The Bible is very clear regarding the individual's moment of existence (Psalm 139:13-16). Nowhere in Scripture does our Lord offer a possibility that we pre-existed with Him in the spirit world. The burden of proof is on the one with the experience and not the objective Word of God.

What can we learn from Betty Eadie and her near-death experience? First and foremost is that near-death experiences tend to alter one's worldview. Raymond Moody in his book *The Light Beyond* offers evidence for such a concern. He states that those who experience a near-death episode

> …emerge with an appreciation of religion that is different from the narrowly defined one established by most churches. They come to realize through this experience that religion is not a matter of one 'right' group versus several 'wrong' groups. People who undergo an NDE come out of it saying that religion concerns your ability to love—not doctrine and

denominations. In short, they think that God is a much more magnanimous being than they previously thought, and that denominations don’t count.

This idea, that doctrine is of no importance but we should only be concerned about love, is parallel to the teachings found in the New Age worldview. Ms. Eadie is in agreement with Dr. Moody’s statement that “love” is our ultimate goal and that religion is simply a vehicle to get us to the party. It makes little or no difference whether we get there in a Ford or a Chevrolet. As warm and cozy as this idea sounds, it does not take into account the words of our Lord in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus was very clear that He wasn’t offering one of many ways, but that He was **The** Way and **The** Truth. He was very confident that salvation was found in no other.

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