

Forcing Change



Different Gospel?

In this issue of *Forcing Change* we're going to explore some of the issues and concerns surrounding Mormonism. Is it a "Christian" religion? What does it teach? Do core differences exist between it and orthodox Christianity? How do we respond?

Today, there's much confusion over Mormonism within the evangelical Christian community. This is due, in part, because recognized figures in Christian circles have suggested partnering for "common ground" with the Latter Day Saints (LDS). However, one the most important factors in the fermentation of Christian confusion is that many - if not most - in the LDS community advocate Mormonism as a furtherance of the Christian faith. And, based on first-hand accounts, this "we are Christian" stance is often implied by LDS missionaries.

Some data at this point may be helpful: In a 2012 Pew Research Center study it was determined that 97% of US-based Mormons considered their faith to be "a Christian religion." The same study also revealed that 50% of non-Mormons considered it to be Christian religion, with 31% of non-Mormons saying it was "not a Christian religion." Nineteen percent responded with "don't know." Apparently, a large portion of the public view Mormonism as a Christian faith.

With the above in mind, this edition of *Forcing Change* provides a number of articles and resources that will help you better understand the history and teaching of the LDS, and the points of contention between Christianity and Mormonism. In contemplating this topic, it will become evident that the LDS presents a different gospel. **FC**

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Carl Teichrib, Editor.

Fast Facts on Mormonism

- Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, was born in Sharon, Vermont in 1805 and died in a clash with opponents in the summer of 1844 at Carthage, Illinois.
- In 1820, Joseph Smith, living in New York state at the time, claimed to receive instruction from two heavenly “personages” who told him that all Christian churches were corrupt and that he was to restore the gospel. Two years later, an angelic visitor told Smith about a hidden stack of golden plates, and in 1827 he apparently received these texts which, Smith asserted, were written in “reformed Egyptian” characters. Viewed through a “seer stone” or special glasses, depending on the account, he translated the plates into English and thus the *Book of Mormon* was revealed as a testament of Jesus Christ in North America.
- Organized Mormonism, which started under Joseph Smith in 1830, is officially called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).
- The Mormons as a community began in New York state, then moved to Kirkland, Ohio. From Ohio some Mormon settlers went to Missouri (Smith had prophesied that the city of Zion, the New Jerusalem, would be established there), but faced persecution and difficulties soon after their arrival. In 1838 the Kirkland location folded. Smith and his followers, including those from parts of Missouri, moved to the settlement of Far West, Missouri. That year, the Missouri Mormon War took place, resulting in a Mormon exodus to the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. Here, the Mormon town of Nauvoo arose (population 12,000 by 1844). However, after Smith’s death, local tensions compelled Brigham Young, the new President of the LDS, to move the community. After a temporary holdover in Nebraska, the pioneer group made the long trek to Utah. Today, the home of the LDS is in Salt Lake City, Utah.
- Books sacred to the LDS: *The Bible* (King James Version), *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. Joseph Smith also revised the Bible, which is known as the *Joseph Smith Translation*, and parts of it are found in *The Pearl of Great Price*.
- The LDS has approximately 15 million followers worldwide, 80,000 active missionaries, almost 30,000 congregations, 141 temples, four universities and colleges, and over 10,000 Welfare Services Missionaries (*LDS Statistics & Church Facts*, www.mormonnewsroom.org).
- A Mormon temple is not the same as a regular ward building or “church.” It is a place to perform “sacred ordinances” for the living and dead, including baptisms for the dead, sealings (temple marriages), and endowments - an elaborate ritual experience.



Mormon or Christian?

The answer to the question, “is Mormonism a Christian religion,” is a simple “no.” The fact that Mormonism denies and/or changes the meaning of key Biblical doctrines, and creates its own theologies that are in opposition to core Biblical teaching, demonstrates that it is not a “Christian religion.”

In responding to the above query, Matt Slick from Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, lays out the following essential doctrines of Christianity.

“The reason Mormonism is not Christian is because it denies one or more of the essential doctrines of Christianity. Here is a basic list of what true Christianity teaches as essential doctrine according to the Bible.

- 1. There is only one God in all existence (Exodus 20:1-4; Isaiah 43:10; 44:6,8; 45:5).**
- 2. Jesus is divine (John 1:1;14; 8:24; Col. 2:9)**
- 3. Forgiveness of sins is by grace alone without works (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:28; 4:1-5)**
- 4. Jesus rose from the dead physically (John 2:19-21; Luke 24:39)**
- 5. The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-4)**

Mormonism denies that there is only one God in all existence and also denies the forgiveness of sins alone in Christ alone. Therefore, it is outside Christianity. It is not a Christian religion.”

Here are a few points to ponder from Mormon teachings,

- **God is flesh and bones, and was and is a man “once as we are now.”** (see, *Doctrines and Covenants* 130:22, and the *King Follett Sermon*).
- **Jesus was a created spirit child who is only different from us by degree** (*D&C* 93:21-23).
- **Salvation (exultation) is by works;** “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (*The Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 25:23).

Many other contentious doctrinal issues come to mind, including the LDS teaching that three levels of heaven exist, with the highest form of salvation - exaltation - elevating the Mormon man to god-status. But this is no easy task, as LDS theologian Bruce McConkie explains,

“Many conditions must exist in order to make such salvation available to men. Without the atonement, the gospel, the priesthood, and the sealing power, there would be no salvation. Without continuous revelation, the ministering of angels, the working of miracles, the prevalence of gifts of the spirit, there would be no salvation. If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation. There is no salvation outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” (Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p.670)

Finally, CARM (carm.org) reminds us; “Mormonism is not Christian because it denies that there is only one God, denies the true Gospel, adds works to salvation, denies that Jesus is the uncreated creator, distorts the biblical teaching of the atonement, undermines the authority and reliability of the Bible, says that God used to be a man who came from another planet, that we can become gods, that there is a goddess mother in heaven, etc.” *FC*

Witnessing to the Cults

By Ed Decker (President, Saints Alive in Jesus)

NOTE: Ed Decker is a former Mormon who spent 20 years in the LDS. His bio states that he was a "member of the Melchizedek priesthood, a Temple Mormon and active in many church positions."

Mr. Decker's apologetics work and evangelism touches on more than just Mormonism. He speaks to concerns regarding Freemasonry, world religions, and cults.

The following article provides some good general guidelines to consider when witnessing to people from cults and other religions.

We are besieged with mail and phone calls from heartsick Christians around the world who have lost a loved one, a child, a parent, a spouse or a friend to one of the many cults that abound in the land. Of course, we get just as many inquiries from Christians who have made the acquaintance of a Mormon or Freemason or Muslim and want to know the best way to share The Good News of Jesus with them.

There are as many variations to the questions and needs as there are groups out there. The New Age, for example, has about as many definitions as it has followers. But there are significant base parallels to every cultic group.

In every case, every attempt is made to humanize God, deify man, minimize sin, and separate you from the authority of Holy Scripture. The last is often done by adding to the Bible, that group's own created scripture of higher authority, usually given by mystical means to that group's spiritual leader. They will also make every effort to convince you that salvation is only available through that group and its special plan for your step into eternity.

This tells you then, that in order to witness to someone in any of the cultic groups, it will be necessary for you to deify and glorify God, reveal mankind as lost to God through sin, demonstrate the validity of the Bible and point the way to the cross as the only way of salvation for mankind.

Simple! No, not at all. Well, if someone shows up that you know is head over heels into some cultic theology, and you know absolutely nothing about it and you don't have time to run to a library, then you can always start from the above premise and you will never go wrong. Trust me, the newly arrived cult member will quickly set you straight on his/her doctrine in any of the above areas.

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But, assuming you do have some time to prepare, I strongly suggest that you learn the simple basics that separate that specific group from orthodox Christianity. Then you are ready to proceed. Almost.

With an acknowledgment and thanks to *Jews For Jesus* for an old tract I carried around until it was unreadable, here it is rewritten with some of my own pointers on witnessing that I consider vital to your success on being a really effective witness:

1. Be a Real Friend. There are a zillion spiritual scalp hunters out there who want to win a lost soul for Jesus, but are completely unaware of the person who is attached to that soul. Try to have an honest and well rounded relationship with your friend before you attempt to witness.

Pray about your own motives and make the association a real one. It is the intensive person to person witness through which most cultists are being won to Christ. It's really true that what you are usually speaks louder than what you say.

Be ready to love that person exactly as they are and where they are, even if they never leave that cult. I am convinced that the vast majority of these people are where they are because they really want to serve God with all their hearts. These people are not God's enemies nor are they ours. They are victims of false teachers. The Scriptures say "For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed." (Isa. 9:16)

2. Encourage Discussion on Life issues to get some insight on how your friend perceives and understand things. Listen to where his (her) heart really is. Get him to talk about the things which concern him and lead him into a discussion about what his group means to him. People are in cults for many different reasons.

In no way let him come to the understanding that you only care for him as long as you might convert him. Love that person right now!

3. In Some Way Give Your Own Testimony. A good place to begin is to tell specifically how God has answered prayer in your life. Avoid testimonies that talk about the peace and joy you have in the Lord.

Remember, those who follow Eastern religions and any number of the new cults will give just as fervent a testimony. Like the Mormons who use their burning in the bosom as a test of truth, each group has its own subjective method of instilling a counterfeit sense of security.

4. Answer all questions and objections from Scripture. But remember, you don't have to answer every question when it's asked. In fact, your friend will feel a whole lot more comfortable with you if you can't. You can say, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll find out," or "Let me think about it a little more and I'll give you an answer the next time I see you." Then, find the answer, be sure you understand it, and bring it back!

5. Have your friend study the Bible with you. Don't concentrate only on their theological problem areas. There is power in all the Scripture. A good beginning point is the first chapter of The Book Of John.

6. Offer to pray for your friend's needs. While an apologetics kind of ministry is not always welcomed, few people will decline prayer and God seems to be particularly pleased to honor prayers as evidence of His love and concern in these cases.

7. Try to bring your friend into the communication sphere of other Christians who are former members of that cultic group. Such a meeting might be painful at first, but it does bring people to the place where they can see that there really can be a God-centered life after the cult.
8. Emphasize that Christ is the sin bearer for you and your friend alike. Remember that your friend has been programmed to think that he has to carry his own sin until it can be released only through his cult group leadership. It's up to you to show him that is not true!
9. Ask for a decision. As a general rule, it's not good to continually press for a decision, but you will prayerfully know when the timing is right in the matter.
10. Remember the areas that the cult cannot deal with and bring your friend to an understanding of these important matters; the power of the shed blood of Jesus, the Cross and the nature of salvation by grace. Be able to give a good, clear definition of the doctrine of the Trinity, an area of confusion with every cult.
11. Always pray before your visits. Going into this sphere of spiritual contact without the Holy Spirit is dangerous for both you and your friend. The Scriptures promise us the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us at times such as this.

Realize that your friend is under spiritual bondage which can only be broken through intercessory prayer. It is vital that if you have a burden for this person that you be involved in persistent, aggressive prayer directed against the principalities of powers of darkness over him. Pray according to the Bible that the strongman be bound so that his captive can be set free. Ask God to pull down those strongholds and cast down vain imaginations and "every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God..." (2 Cor. 10:4-5)

Ask for the intervention of the Holy Spirit to draw this friend to the Cross of Jesus for salvation. Also, solicit the assistance of the prayer group at your church and/or among other believing friends and family.

This bondage can be broken through prayer in the name of Jesus. Many have been set free through the love, intercession and fellowship of committed friends and relatives.
12. If you need help, write or call and we will be glad to help! (go to www.saintsalive.com for contact details). **FC**

Ed Decker is a former Mormon and the founder of Saints Alive in Jesus (www.saintsalive.com). He is the author of the following books: *My Kingdom Come: The Mormon Quest for Godhood*, *To Moroni With Love*, *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, *The Question of Freemasonry*, and *The Dark Side of Freemasonry*. Moreover, he co-authored *The God Makers* with Dave Hunt, *The God Makers II* with Caryl Matrisciana, and *Fast Facts on False Teaching* with Ron Carlson.

The Mormon Doctrine of Jesus:

A Christian Perspective

By Patrick Zukeran

Note: Dr. Pat Zukeran hosts *Evidence & Answers* (www.evidenceandanswers.org), a Christian apologetics ministry in connection with the Pacific Apologetics Center, and serves on the faculty of the Bible Institute of Hawaii. He has also worked with Probe Ministry (www.probe.org), has penned numerous articles, and is the author of *Unless I See: Is There Enough Evidence to Believe?* (CrossBooks, 2011). Thank you to Dr. Zukeran for allowing *Forcing Change* to reprint this important article.

Jesus a Procreated Being?

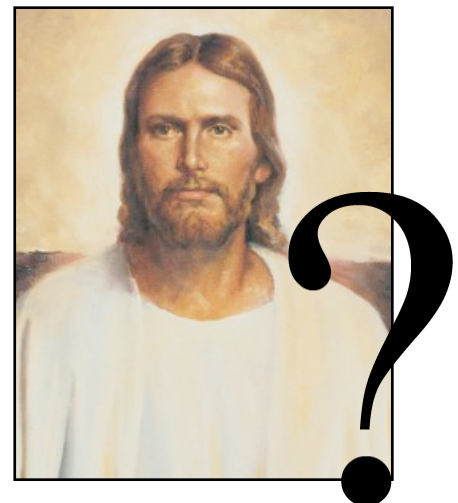
The Mormon Church claims to have restored the true teachings of Jesus. In this article, we will compare the Mormon doctrine of Jesus to the New Testament.

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

According to the Mormon view, Jesus is not unique from the rest of mankind. He is simply the firstborn spirit child. *Doctrine and Covenants* states, “The difference between Jesus and other offspring of Elohim is one of degree not of kind.”⁴ That is why Mormons refer to Jesus as elder brother. James Talmage wrote, “Human beings generally were similarly existent in spirit state prior to their embodiment in the flesh... There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of mankind.”⁵

Mormon doctrine deviates significantly from the Bible, which teaches that Jesus is eternal and not procreated. Although Mormons teach that Jesus is eternal, what they mean is that He existed as a spirit child prior to His incarnation. Being an offspring of Elohim means He was created at some point in time. To support their view, Mormons appeal to John 3:16, which states Jesus is the “only begotten.” The Greek word used there is *monogenes*, which means “unique” or “one of a kind.” It does not mean procreated, but emphasizes uniqueness.

Mormons also appeal to Colossians 1:15, which calls Christ the “Firstborn over all creation.” The Greek word for firstborn is *prototokos*, meaning “first in rank, preeminent one.” It carries the idea of



positional supremacy. Christ is the firstborn in the sense that He is preeminent over all creation. Renowned Greek scholar, the late F.F. Bruce, wrote on how the term was used during the time in which Paul wrote.

“The word firstborn had long since ceased to be used exclusively in its literal sense, just as prime (from the Latin word *primus*--first) with us. The Prime Minister is not the first minister we have had; he is the most preeminent... Similarly, firstborn came to denote (among the ancients) not priority in time but preeminence in rank.”⁶

Psalms 89:27 in the Septuagint calls David the firstborn. We all know David is not the first-born son in his family, nor is he the first king of Israel. “Firstborn” here is a title of preeminence.

These Bible verses do not support the teaching that Jesus is a procreated being. The Bible further teaches Jesus is an eternal being. He had no beginning. Colossians 1:17 states, “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” Christ as the eternal Son of God existed before all creation. Since Christ is “before all things,” He did not depend on anyone or anything for His creation or existence.

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

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

Lucifer and Jesus

According to Mormon theology, God the Father lives on a planet with His spirit wives procreating spirit children who await physical bodies to inhabit. As we learned earlier, Jesus is the first son born to Elohim. God the Father had numerous other offspring, which included Lucifer. This makes him a spirit brother of Jesus and of all human beings. Mormon theologian LeGrand Richards writes, “Satan was just as much a man in the spirit world, as were those spirits who have been given bodies through birth in this world.”⁹

Mormonism teaches that Jesus and Lucifer were involved in planning mankind's eternal destiny. In order to attain godhood like our heavenly parents, the spirit children needed to leave the presence of their heavenly Father, inhabit a physical body, and live a worthy life. Elohim knew that mankind would sin and thus require a savior to pay for sin and show us how to return to our heavenly father. At the heavenly council, Jesus and Lucifer proposed their plans. Lucifer offered to go to earth and be the savior but he wanted to force everyone to be saved and do everything himself. Jesus desired to give man the freedom of choice. The Father chose Jesus' plan. Angered by the decision, Lucifer persuaded one third

of the spirit children to rebel and a war in heaven took place between Satan's forces and Jesus and His followers. Lucifer was defeated, cast out of heaven, and denied the right to inhabit mortal bodies.¹⁰

Without the ability to attain physical bodies, exaltation to the Celestial kingdom is impossible. He became known as Satan and his followers became the demons who now exist on earth as spirits opposing God's work. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states,

“The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the worlds was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the savior of mankind.”¹¹

The Bible teaches that Jesus is not the spirit brother of Lucifer or of human beings. Lucifer is an angel and part of the created order. Ezekiel 28:13-19 reveals that Lucifer, in contrast to Jesus, is a created cherub angel. Colossians 1:16 tells us that Christ is the Creator of all things, including the angelic realm. The words “thrones,” “dominions,” “principalities” and “powers” were used by rabbinical Jews to describe different orders of angels. In Colossae, there was a problem of worshipping angels. Christ had been degraded to their level. Paul's argument here is that Christ is superior to the angels for Christ created them. Lucifer falls into this category of a created angel, thus making him a created being. Hebrews 1:4 also reinforces the fact that Jesus, being God the Son, is superior in nature to the angels. Christ is Creator, while Lucifer is creature, two totally different classes and they cannot be spirit brothers as Mormonism teaches.

The Incarnation of Christ

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

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

James Talmage wrote, “Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh.”¹⁴

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

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

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

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

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

The Atoning Work of Christ

Another key area in which Mormon theology deviates from biblical teaching is their view of the atoning work of Christ. To understand this, we must understand the Mormon view of the fall. According to Mormon theology, Adam was given two conflicting commands by God: one to become mortal and the other not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; out of which mortality, children, and death would result. Adam chose to eat of the fruit for it was the only way salvation could come to mankind.¹⁸ As a result of the fall, Adam and Eve left their purely spiritual state and became physical beings. Mortality and child bearing would provide the way to exaltation and godhood. Man then inherited a dual nature, one physical and the other spiritual.¹⁹

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

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

Mormonism teaches there are three levels of heaven: *telestial* is the lowest level, the *terrestrial*, and *celestial*. The resurrection of Christ allows non-Mormons entrance to the telestial or terrestrial kingdom. All Mormons desire the celestial level where they attain exaltation to godhood. Attaining to this level depends on their life here on earth. The Mormon Church and Joseph Smith play the major roles in achieving exaltation. *Gospel Principles* tell us that Jesus “became our savior and He did His part to help us return to our heavenly home. It is now up to each of us to do our part and become worthy of exaltation.”²³

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

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

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

Jesus the Polygamist?

As we have studied, the Mormon doctrine of Jesus deviates from the Jesus of the Bible in several key areas. Another unique teaching of Mormonism on the life of Christ is in regards to His marital state. Mormonism teaches that while on earth, Jesus was married to at least three women. Although Mormons today try to distance themselves from this teaching, it is clearly a part of their historical record. Orson Hyde, one of the original Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church and who was ordained by Joseph Smith, cites the gospel of John when he writes,

“Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana of Galilee, and He told them what to do. Now there was actually a marriage; and if Jesus was not the bridegroom on that occasion, please tell who was. I shall say here, that before the Savior died, He looked upon his own natural children as we look upon ours.”²⁴

Mormonism teaches that Jesus was not only married, but He had a family. In a speech given by Hyde in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, he exclaimed,

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

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

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

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

Endnotes:

1. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21-23.
2. *Gospel Principles*, 11.
3. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 425.
4. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21
5. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 426.
6. F.F. Bruce, *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979) quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 126.
7. Harold Kuhn, "Creation," in *Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. Henry. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983.), 61, quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
8. Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1983), 996, quoted in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
9. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Desert Publishing Company), 277.
10. *Gospel Principles*, 16-17.
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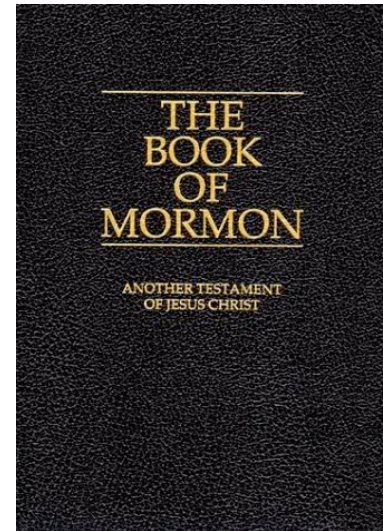
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The “Impossible Gospel” Presentation and Its Continued Relevance for Modern Mormonism

By Aaron Shafovaloff

Bio Note: “Aaron became a student of Mormonism in 1998, when he was introduced to the religion by neighbors. His life was forever changed when he discovered Romans 4:5, “And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness”. He looks back at his conversion in contrast to the “impossible gospel” set forth in the *Miracle of Forgiveness* and the “after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23; cf. Moroni 10:32) requirement that he could never live up to.” Aaron is a web developer working with the Mormon Research Ministry.

Editor’s Note: Thank you to the Mormon Research Ministry for granting permission to publish “The Impossible Presentation” by Aaron Shafovaloff in this edition of Forcing Change. The website for the Mormon Research Ministry is www.mrm.org.



Final Note: The “impossible gospel” is the complex and never achievable moral and spiritual requirements that the Mormon needs to attain, through good works and ever trying, in order to make it into the celestial heavenly kingdom.

"Who can say, 'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'?" - *Proverbs 20:9*

"Our prayers have stains in them, our faith is mixed with unbelief, our repentance is not so tender as it should be, our communion is distant and interrupted. We cannot pray without sinning, and there is filth even in our tears." - *Charles Spurgeon*

The “impossible gospel” is an evangelistic presentation that attempts to remove the complacency and lack of urgency that Mormons have toward their plight before God and their own religion's teachings on the gospel. [**Editor’s Note:** To better understand the “impossible gospel” approach, go to the following website and check out the video presentations by *Evidence Ministries*, www.evidenceministries.org/impossible-gospel].

As part of the biblical model of “law before gospel” - helping someone understand their sin and deserved penalty before expressing to them the simplicity of the gospel of grace - the “impossible gospel” challenges them with the highest standards set forth by the *Book of Mormon* and other authoritative Mormon sources. These high standards can be summarized as follows: God has enabled us to do our best, and our best is not simply to try hard, but is to keep all of the

commandments all of the time. This is perfection, and is the culmination of completing the six steps of repentance, all of which are prerequisites for receiving the forgiveness of sins.

Mormon Apostle Dallin H. Oaks reminds Mormons that the assurance of forgiveness “comes when a person has completed all the steps of repentance” (BYU devotional address, 1981). For those who have been meaningfully exposed to the Mormon gospel, the deadline for completing the six steps of repentance is the end of this “mortal probation,” which ends at physical death. Failing to take available opportunities to complete the six steps of repentance and cease the need for further repentance is “procrastinating one’s repentance.”

According to the *Book of Mormon*, those who procrastinate their repentance are forever sealed to Satan and will have no post-mortal opportunity to perform the labors of repentance. They are forever kept under his power (Alma 34:35).

All of this amounts to a daunting message that is anything but good news, but it is nevertheless supported by other Book of Mormon sources. 1 Nephi 3:7 teaches that God doesn't give commandments that he doesn't enable the Mormon to successfully keep (including the commandments to be holy and perfect). Alma 11:37 teaches that Mormons “cannot be saved in [their] sins.” Moroni 10:32, a passage that Mormon authorities have often linked with the “after all we can do” language of 2 Nephi 25:23, teaches that God's grace becomes sufficient for Mormons after they have perfected themselves by denying themselves of all ungodliness and loving God with all their might, mind, and strength.

As the currently used LDS church manual *Gospel Principles* makes clear by quoting 12th President Spencer W. Kimball, forgiveness is available only to those who accomplish a perfect repentance:

“Elder Kimball warns: ‘Even though forgiveness is so abundantly promised, there is no promise nor indication of forgiveness to any soul who does not totally repent... We can hardly be too forceful in reminding people that they cannot sin and be forgiven and then sin again and again and expect forgiveness’ (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, pp. 353, 360). Those who receive forgiveness and then repeat the sin are held accountable for their former sins (see D&C 82:7; Ether 2:15)” (*Gospel Principles*, pp. 252-253).

Another position in Mormonism regarding repentance and forgiveness is so popular among members that it can be called an established “folk doctrine.” Some BYU professors have promoted this kind of doctrine in a more sophisticated way with an extraordinary use of evangelical language. Some call it Mormon “neo-orthodoxy.” The standard assumption by its adherents recognizes that perfection is impossible to achieve in this life and therefore is not necessary for receiving the forgiveness of sins. As it is popularly put, “If I try my best, Christ will do the rest.”

In this position, to “try our best,” means to give an effort in keeping the commandments much of the time, but not necessarily all of the time. And that is all that God realistically expects of a person. However, Spencer Kimball taught that “Trying is not sufficient. Nor is repentance complete when one merely tries to abandon sin” (*Miracle of Forgiveness*, p.164). But in popular Mormon folk doctrine and neo-orthodoxy, this kind of thinking is quietly dismissed.

Some Christians have interpreted the neo-orthodoxy of some BYU professors, and the effect it has had on some Mormons, as cause for extraordinary optimism. They perceive Mormonism as making a quiet move to a sufficiently biblical view of salvation, thus lessening the need for urgency and grave warning in evangelism to Mormons. Indeed, some of these people suggest that continuing to seriously challenge Mormons on these issues will discourage the kind of interfaith dialog that supposedly is a catalyst for the quiet, wholesale movement to evangelicalism. This naiveté is not only destructive to evangelism, it also fails to take into account the larger, integrated system of doctrine and interplay of regulative influences within Mormonism.

British author Douglas Davies (a non-Mormon), in his book *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (p.58), remarks on the neo-orthodox movement within Mormonism and the “checks and balances” that keep it from having a thoroughgoing impact:

“What may be happening in these affirmations of grace by authors such as Mangum, Yorgason, Millett, and Robinson is a twofold development in turn of the century and millennium LDS life. The one answers the needs of devoted Saints, labouring under apparently impossible goals of achievement, the other displays the preparedness of a Church that now need not fear its distinct identity to accept wider Christians theological terms. It is as though modern Mormonism feels free to draw on the discourse of grace... Amongst [‘the currents running within the current Mormon culture of salvation’] we find various checks and balances underlying undue movements in doctrine, with one example relating to a debate between Millett and some Baptist theologians on the issue of grace. This led to Boyd K. Packer, one of the most senior of the Twelve Apostles, addressing himself to the topic in a major satellite broadcast to church members in February 1998. Amongst other doctrines, he emphasized Latter-day Saints ‘belief in the saving power of works in conjunction with Christ’s sacrifice, rather than salvation by grace alone’.”

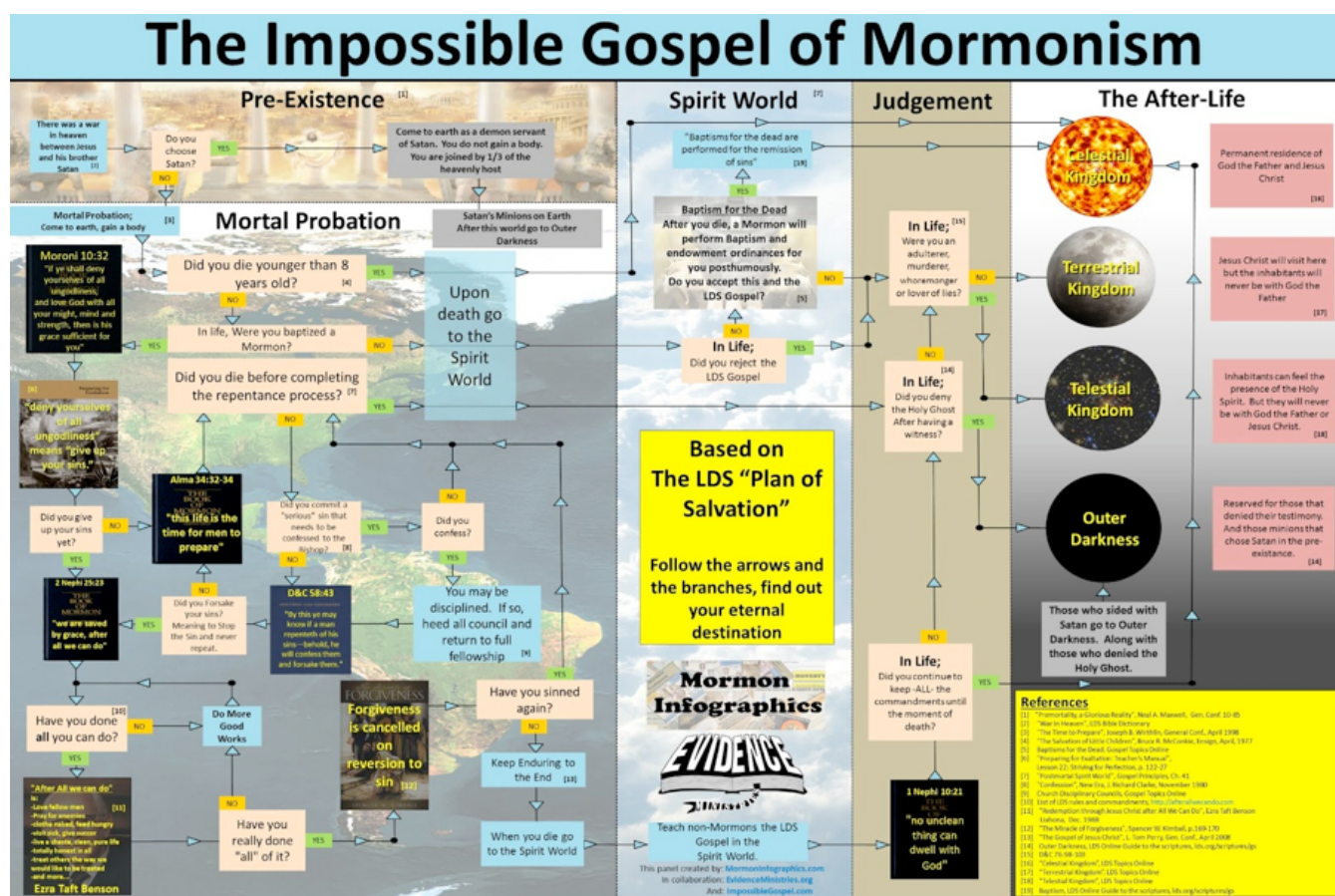
“Checks and balances” abound, as the wider Mormon worldview and religious experience continue to foster a view of God and salvation that keep members at a tragic, damnable distance from the simplicity of the biblical gospel of salvation by grace through faith apart from works. This also includes the nature of God being fundamentally of the human species, the purpose of life being to prove ourselves morally worthy unto exaltation and godhood, the focus on ordinances and submission to leadership controlled by the “priesthood authority,” temple recommend interviews, and exclusion of those that don’t live up to the Mormon external standard of righteousness. All affect a Mormon’s view of repentance and forgiveness.

Church-published literature that promotes elements of the “impossible gospel” are actively used as curriculum, and aren’t going away anytime soon. All things considered, not much has changed the Mormon view on repentance and forgiveness.

Both mentioned positions are used by individual Mormons to cope with one’s sin and seek forgiveness. Mormon friends in Utah have confided in me that while they may use the more

rigid “impossible gospel” standard for a sin like stealing or not paying one's tithing, they use the folk standard (of simply trying hard) when confronted with deeper heart-issues like pride and lust. The end result is that many Mormons, already having found a way to mentally cope with personal guilt, direct focus on achieving temple worthiness in the Mormon community, not justification of the ungodly by faith before a Holy God. So, as much as some would like to begin singing John Newton's “Amazing Grace” with Mormons in celebratory, optimistic fashion, we should instead still be praying for the salvation of Mormons and challenging them with the soul-searching questions over their “impossible gospel.” *FC*

Note: The “impossible gospel” of Mormonism is seen in the graphic below, which demonstrates the convoluted and impossible nature of trying to achieve “exultation.” This graphic in larger print can be downloaded at www.mormoninfographics.com/2012/11/the-impossible-gospel-of-mormonism-plan.html.



Doctrine and Covenants 137:7

Is it better to have never known?

By Bill McKeever

Note: Bill McKeever is the founder of the Mormon Research Ministry (www.mrm.org). Since 1979 he has been working to inform the Christian community regarding the differences between Mormonism and Christianity. He's also the author of *Answering Mormon's Questions* and co-wrote *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend*. Thank you to Bill McKeever for allowing this article to be reprinted.

Mormons often pride themselves in the fact that Mormonism can be a hard religion to live up to. Unlike "gracers" (such as myself, I suppose), theirs is a religion of action and effort. If true salvation, otherwise known as exaltation in the celestial kingdom, is to be gained, it must be earned. In the words of Thomas Monson, President Gordon Hinckley's first counselor, "It is the celestial glory which we seek. It is in the presence of God we desire to dwell. It is a forever family in which we want membership. Such blessings must be earned." (Thomas Monson, "An Invitation to Exaltation," *Ensign* (Conference Edition), May 1988, p.53).

To insist that the true Christian faith is not a religion of action and effort is to commit a huge stereotype. The New Testament informs every Christian that we are saved "*unto* good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Good works should follow conversion, we just can't accept the unbiblical position that the good works we perform have any bearing on our justification before God. They are a part of our personal sanctification, not our justification.

I don't disagree that Mormonism sets a very high standard for its adherents. It is just that I have never known of a Mormon who has ever met that standard. Mormons talk a lot about keeping *all* of the commandments and forsaking *all* sin, but I've never come across one who has done this.

It is true that a Latter-day Saint is under some serious obligations. In fact, so strict are these requirements that tenth Mormon President Joseph Fielding Smith said that it is not likely that even half of all Mormons will be saved in the celestial kingdom! He wrote,

"There will not be such an overwhelming number of the Latter-day Saints who will get there. President Francis M. Lyman many times has declared, and he had reason to declare, I believe, that if we save one-half of the Latter-day Saints, that is, with an exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God, we will be doing well. Not that the Lord is partial, not that he will draw the line as some will say, to keep people out. He would have every one of us go in if we would; but there are laws and ordinances that we must keep; if we do not observe the law we cannot enter" (*Doctrines of Salvation* 2:15).

Imagine the impact of the above statement. If what Smith (and Lyman) said is true, that means that approximately 7.5 million of the more than 15 million Mormons will be spending eternity with non-Mormons (based on 2013 membership statistics).

However, Joseph Smith offers an interesting loophole found in *Doctrine and Covenants* 137:7. It reads, "*Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God.*"

In other words, if you had never heard of Mormonism but would have embraced it had you heard, you are entitled to a free pass. Without any sacrifice whatsoever, you get to enjoy an eternity in the best place that the Mormon religion has to offer. In fact, you will apparently have access to the same place that hard-working Mormons who, during their lifetimes, denied themselves of such things as coffee, tea, and the tithe of their gross income - along with a host of other demands placed on them by their church leaders - eventually hope to go.

It seems to me that if the Mormon Church really wanted the best for humanity, they would recall their missionary force. After all, if the celestial kingdom awaits those who had never known but would have accepted had they known, they are better off being completely ignorant about Joseph Smith and his "restored" gospel rather than risk accepting it now and not being able to live up to this religion's many requirements. *FC*

- Words of Jesus Christ -

Note: Thank you to Shane and Kim Jones of Trigrace.org for pointing *Forcing Change* to the Trigrace tracks and resources. The following text is based on a track given out to Mormons, and is meant to spur thought and discussion.

Would you agree with the Christian belief that Jesus is the most important person who ever lived on this earth? Would you also agree that the Words of Jesus are the most important words ever spoken?

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)

So, are the Words of Jesus the absolute truth?

It truly is All about Jesus & His Words!

Isaiah prophesied, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" - Isaiah 9:6.

It is an undeniable fact that ALL Christians believe Jesus is the most important person who ever lived on this earth. No other human being is said to be, "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

It is instructive to consider what Jesus had to say about the truths he brought to our world:

- Jesus promised to preserve the truth of His words to all generations when He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33).

- Jesus said His words were the absolute truth, "Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me'." (John 8:31-32, 14:6).

- In John chapter 6, Jesus asked the people, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"

He then went on to claim the following about the importance of His teachings, "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like; He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6:40-48).

- Jesus even went to so far as to claim it would be His words that would judge us in the final judgment, "If anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." (John 12:46-48).

If Jesus truly is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, He is not only the most important person who ever lived, but the truths He taught are the most important words ever spoken to mankind.

A Challenge for You

We have in our Bible, four eye witness accounts of Jesus Christ's life and teachings: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

We challenge you to read the Gospel of John this week... and try to view the words of Jesus with the eyes of a child because Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3.

Three thoughts to ponder as you read John's gospel:

#1. Look for truths taught by Jesus which might surprise you.

#2. Try to find a place where Jesus taught the religious beliefs you hold to be most precious.

#3. Align your thinking and beliefs with the truths taught by Jesus no matter what it costs you.

Forcing Change

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