



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
**Volume 10 Number 26**  
**July 8, 2015**

**Is Mormonism Changing?**

***The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 21st Century***

By Tal Davis

"Good day, sir. This Elder Morales and I am Elder Glenn. We are representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Are you familiar with our church?"

You stand there at the door for a moment trying to analyze what is happening. You see two young men, both dressed in white shirts and dark ties with black slacks. They have short haircuts and are holding book bags. You also notice two bicycles parked on the sidewalk. You quickly identify the boys: "Mormon missionaries!"

That kind of encounter has been a common scenario for decades as thousands of young missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons) have dutifully gone door-to-door spreading the message of the "Restored Gospel" given to Joseph Smith, Jr., in the early 19th Century. As wholesome and family friendly as the LDS image has become, evangelical Christians have understood that Mormonism is categorically different from orthodox historic Christianity in nearly every area of essential theological doctrine.

However, over the past couple of decades, the LDS has strategically sought to change its brand publically to that of a Christian denomination with only a few minor differences. Several significant books written by LDS scholars, some in cooperation with notable evangelical scholars, have downplayed the crucial differences between Christianity and Mormonism. Some have even

tried to reinterpret or redefine some historic Mormon teachings to make them seem less divergent from orthodoxy. For instance, one prominent Brigham Young University professor has attempted to compare the Mormon concept of exaltation to godhood to the Eastern Orthodox concept of deification.

One Baptist theologian at Baylor University, Roger E. Olsen, recently blogged that he believes some LDS theologians truly desire to have the LDS adopt more orthodox perspectives of key theological issues. To his credit, Olsen does not say they have arrived at that position, but is optimistic that it could happen. He uses as an example of how the Worldwide Church of God, an Armstrongist group once regarded as a cult, officially reformed its theology to embrace orthodox views on the nature of God (the Trinity) and salvation by grace through faith. He also points out how the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the 1990s gradually purged what vestiges of Mormonism it still held, changed its name to the Community of Christ, and became essentially a liberal mainline Protestant denomination. (One might ask, "Was that really any better?")

In any case, we must caution Olsen and other evangelical Christian academics who think the LDS will, or even can, make such a radical change in doctrines. Though some LDS scholars may seem to be drifting toward more orthodox definitions, their views are not what really matters in the LDS official teachings. Doctrinal issues are determined by the church's General Authorities, specifically the First Presidency which consists of the church President and his (usually) two

## Permission to Reprint

If you wish to reprint this article in your own print or electronic newsletter, please include the following text:

*Reprinted from **Worldview Made Practical**; a free e-zine produced by **MarketFaith Ministries** featuring practical teaching and life tools to help Christians become more effective in their faith life. Discover **MarketFaith Ministries** at [www.marketfaith.org](http://www.marketfaith.org).*

## Speaking Schedule

If you are interested in having Freddy Davis or Tal Davis present one of our **Worldview Seminars** or to share about worldview and its practical implications at your church or organization, please contact **MarketFaith Ministries** to schedule your event. All contact information is at the bottom of this e-zine.

## Worldview Resources

It is one of the primary purposes of **MarketFaith Ministries** to provide resources to help Christians understand the practical implications of worldview. You can find many free resources that will help you in your quest at <http://www.marketfaith.org>.

Counselors. The President is regarded as a "living prophet, seer, and revelator" who can, if (supposedly) directed by God by special revelation, make radical changes in theology and practice. Note, it has been done twice in the LDS' history: 1890 (Pres. Wilford Woodruff) regarding polygamy; and 1978 (Pres. Spencer Kimball) regarding black men receiving the church priesthoods. However, in both of those cases the "revelations" came in response to strong political and social pressures applied to the church. So, while theoretically the LDS First Presidency could make major changes in church doctrine, it seems unlikely to happen anytime soon.

So, what exactly is current official LDS doctrine? In 1997 I co-wrote a book with R. Philip Roberts and Sandra Tanner called *Mormonism Unmasked*. That same year I also helped produce a documentary titled *The Mormon Puzzle*. More recently, on our [MarketFaith.org](http://MarketFaith.org) website, we published a point by point documented comparison of historic Christian doctrine with LDS doctrine. It was based on official church documents. (See it at: *Mormonism Versus Christianity- Can They Both Be Christian? Part 1*; and *Mormonism Versus Christianity - Can They Both Be Christian? Part 2*). Let's examine some of those key beliefs and see if the official teachings, as presented on the LDS official website ([www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org)) have substantially changed from what we reported in 1997, and on our website. We will first present what is on our website and then quote from the official LDS church teaching manual titled *Gospel Principles* (GP), 2011 edition, for the current Mormon theological positions.

*Gospel Principles* is online in its entirety at: (<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&>

[rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&sqi=2&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lds.org%2Fmanual%2Fgospel-principles%3Flang%3Deng&ei=9VCLVeWjGoLt-QG72o-YAw&usq=AFQjCNE7wPBDCqezAH8lf3uekwxSz3UgAQ&bvm=bv.96339352,d.cWw](https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles?lang=Deng&ei=9VCLVeWjGoLt-QG72o-YAw&usq=AFQjCNE7wPBDCqezAH8lf3uekwxSz3UgAQ&bvm=bv.96339352,d.cWw))

## 1. God

**OUR WEB STATEMENT:** In Mormonism, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are often talked about, but what they mean is three totally separate entities or gods. "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us" (D&C 130:22).

**LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES** (2011 ed.) Because we are made in His image (see PGP Moses 2:26; 6:9), we know that our bodies are like His body. His eternal spirit is housed in a tangible body of flesh and bones (see D&C 130:22). God's body, however, is perfected and glorified, with a glory beyond all description.

## 2. Jesus Christ

**OUR WEB STATEMENT:** Jesus is special in Mormonism in one regard, however. He was the "only begotten" physical offspring of God by physical procreation on earth. "Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father. That is why he is called the Only Begotten Son" (GP, p. 64). Thus, in LDS belief, the Heavenly Father impregnated Mary to carry his only physical offspring, Jesus. Thus, Jesus was literally the physical "Son of God" and the only person qualified to make atonement for Adam's Fall.

**LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES** (2011 ed.) The story of the birth and life of the Savior is found in the New Testament in the books of Matthew, Mark,

## Subscription Information SUBSCRIPTION NOTICE:

A subscription to **Worldview Made Practical** is complementary for anyone interested in receiving it. If you received this email as a forward from a family member or a friend and wish to subscribe for yourself, you may do so at [www.marketfaith.org](http://www.marketfaith.org). If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter, simply follow the instructions found at the bottom of each edition.

## Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:  
[info@marketfaith.org](mailto:info@marketfaith.org)

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

You can order our products and examine our services at  
<http://www.marketfaith.org>.

This issue of **Worldview Made Practical** is a production of **MarketFaith Ministries**, © 2015. All rights reserved.

Luke, and John. From their accounts we learn that Jesus was born of a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to marry Joseph when an angel of the Lord appeared to her. The angel told her that she was to be the mother of the Son of God. She asked him how this was possible (see Luke 1:34). He told her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Thus, God the Father became the literal Father of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal Father. That is why He is called the Only Begotten Son. He inherited divine powers from His Father. From His mother He inherited mortality and was subject to hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, and death. No one could take the Savior's life from Him unless He willed it. He had power to lay it down and power to take up His body again after dying. (See John 10:17-18.)

### 3. Scriptures and Authority

OUR WEB STATEMENT: Mormons, however, affirm what they call the LDS "Four Standard Works" as authoritative. These include the Bible "as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8). However, Joseph Smith claimed that the Bible we now have was corrupted by the Great Apostasy and therefore is incomplete, corrupted, and not reliable. Though Mormons use the King James Bible, they accept Smith's assertion that there was a need for a restoration of the fullness of the true Gospel through other written and prophetic sources.

So the LDS also includes The Book of Mormon (BOM) in their list of Scriptures. Joseph Smith boldly declared it is "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of

our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 194).

Mormons also regard The Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) as one of their inspired scriptures. This book, usually published under a single cover with the Pearl of Great Price, according to the LDS" is a collection of modern revelations . . . regarding The Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored in these last days" (GP, p. 54). Joseph Smith, and other LDS prophet/presidents, supposedly received dozens of direct communications from God that were recorded and published in the D&C.

The final of the Four Standard Works is The Pearl of the Great Price (PGP). It is a collection of documents either written or "translated" by Joseph Smith. "It clarifies doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives added information concerning the creation of the earth" (GP, p. 54).

Though Mormons claim their Four Standard Works are divinely inspired, they do not regard them as the final word. The LDS church's president is regarded as "a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet" (D&C 107:91-92). Thus, he is capable of receiving, just as did Joseph Smith, direct revelation from God.

LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES (2011 ed.): "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8).

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord has expanded our understanding of some passages in the Bible. The Lord inspired the Prophet Joseph to restore truths to the Bible text that had been lost or changed since the original words were written. These inspired corrections are called

the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. In the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible, selected passages from the Joseph Smith Translation are found on pages 797-813 and in many footnotes.

The Book of Mormon (BOM) is a sacred record of some of the people who lived on the American continents between about 2000 B.C. and A.D. 400. It contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ (see D&C 20:9; 42:12; 135:3). The Book of Mormon tells of the visit Jesus Christ made to the people in the Americas soon after His Resurrection.

Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon into English through the gift and power of God. He said that it is "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."

The Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) is a collection of modern revelations. This book contains the revelations regarding the Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored in these last days.

The Pearl of Great Price (PGP) contains the book of Moses, the book of Abraham, and some inspired writings of Joseph Smith.

In addition to these four books of scripture, the inspired words of our living prophets become scripture to us. "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Articles of Faith 1:9).

#### 4. Humanity

OUR WEB STATEMENT: Mormonism however, teaches that all people are the preexistent spiritual offspring of the Heavenly Father and Mother.

So when the LDS says men are in the "image and likeness of God" they mean it literally. Men are physically the same as Heavenly Father. Women are like the Heavenly Mother (who, by the way, is ignored by Mormons in their prayers, etc.). Furthermore, men may aspire to become like Heavenly Father and be exalted "as gods of their own worlds."

LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES (2011 ed.): God is not only our Ruler and Creator; He is also our Heavenly Father. All men and women are literally the sons and daughters of God. "Man, as a spirit, was begotten

and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal [physical] body" (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith [1998], 335).

Our Heavenly Father is perfect, and He glories in the fact that it is possible for His children to become like Him. His work and glory is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

Those who receive exaltation in the celestial kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ will receive special blessings. The Lord has promised, "All things are theirs" (D&C 76:59). These are some of the blessings given to exalted people:

1. They will live eternally in the presence of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ (see D&C 76:62).
2. They will become gods (see D&C 132:20-23).
3. They will be united eternally with their righteous family members and will be able to have eternal increase.
4. They will receive a fulness (sic) of joy.
5. They will have everything that our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have – all power, glory, dominion, and knowledge (see D&C 132:19-20). President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: "The Father has promised through the Son that all that he has shall be given to those who are obedient to His commandments. They shall increase in knowledge, wisdom, and power, going from grace to grace, until the fulness of the perfect day shall burst upon them" (Doctrines of Salvation, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954-56], 2:36; italics in original).

#### 5. Sin

OUR WEB STATEMENT: According to the LDS, Adam's Fall was actually a necessary part of Heavenly Father's plan. It caused a loss of immortality for all humanity which was necessary for mankind to reproduce and advance (see GP, pp. 31-34). As Eve declared, according to LDS scripture, "Were it not for our transgression we never should have ... known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient" (PGP, Moses 5:11; see also BOM, 2 Nephi 2:22-25).

So, according to Mormonism, Adam's sin was a good thing. If he had not done so and remained immortal, we would not be here, nor could people progress to godhood. Mormons do believe people still sin. It is not, however, because they have a sinful nature, but

by willful disobedience to God's laws. Each person is responsible for his or her own sin.

LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES (2011 ed.): Some people believe Adam and Eve committed a serious sin when they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, latter-day scriptures help us understand that their Fall was a necessary step in the plan of life and a great blessing to all of us. Because of the Fall, we are blessed with physical bodies, the right to choose between good and evil, and the opportunity to gain eternal life. None of these privileges would have been ours had Adam and Eve remained in the garden.

## 6. Salvation

OUR WEB STATEMENT: In Mormonism, Jesus' atonement provided immortality for all people. According to their doctrine, Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, death on the cross, and resurrection, guaranteed that all people, whether or not they are Mormon or Christian, will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns. This is only the first step, however, for the determination of one's eternal destiny. That is dependent primarily on one's works and standing within the LDS church which will be adjudicated at the Final Judgment after the Millennium.

Exaltation (godhood) is available only to faithful Mormons through moral living and obedience to LDS teachings: faith, baptism, receiving of the Holy Ghost, endowments (secret rituals conducted only in LDS temples), celestial marriage (also conducted in temples), and tithing. Mormons who are not faithful in their personal morality and religious practice will not be exalted. In any case all people, with only a few exceptions, will be consigned to one of three levels of glory depending on their life's behavior.

LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES (2011 ed.): Christ thus overcame physical death. Because of His Atonement, everyone born on this earth will be resurrected (see 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). Just as Jesus was resurrected, our spirits will be reunited with our bodies, "that they can die no more ... , never to be divided" (Alma 11:45). This condition is called immortality. All people who have ever lived will be resurrected, "both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous" (Alma 11:44).

To be exalted, we first must place our faith in Jesus Christ and then endure in that faith to the end of our lives. Our faith in Him must be such that we repent of our sins and obey His commandments.

He commands us all to receive certain ordinances:

1. We must be baptized.
2. We must receive the laying on of hands to be confirmed a member of the Church of Jesus Christ and to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
3. Brethren must receive the Melchizedek Priesthood and magnify their callings in the priesthood.
4. We must receive the temple endowment.
5. We must be married for eternity, either in this life or in the next.

## 7. Life after Death

OUR WEB STATEMENT: Mormonism has a complex concept of eternal life consisting of three levels of eternal glory. First is exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom for faithful Mormons where people may become gods or angels. "Then shall they be gods" (D&C 132:20). "Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God - Wherefore, all things are theirs" (D&C, 76:58-59).

The second level of glory is the Terrestrial Kingdom which is for non-practicing Mormons and righteous non-Mormons. Good people of all religions who have lived decent lives will enjoy eternity in this wonderful kingdom where they will have fellowship with Jesus (but not the Heavenly Father). "These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fullness" (D&C 76:75-76).

The third level, called the Telestial Kingdom, is reserved for wicked and ungodly people. It is, however, not hell. It is actually a nice place where they will have fellowship with the Holy Ghost (but not Heavenly Father or Jesus).; "These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers ... who suffer the wrath of God on earth" (D&C 76:103-104). (See also D&C 76:57-119; 131:1-4.)

Mormonism teaches that only a few people, along with the devil and his rebellious angels (one-third of Heavenly Father's children who rebelled against him in the pre-existence), will go to "Perdition" or eternal hell.

LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES (2011 ed.): At the Final Judgment we will inherit a place in the kingdom for which we are prepared. The scriptures teach of three kingdoms of glory – the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, and the telestial kingdom (see D&C 88:20-32).

### ***Celestial***

"They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized, ... that by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit." These are they who overcome the world by their faith. They are just and true so that the Holy Ghost can seal their blessings upon them. (See D&C 76:51-53.) Those who inherit the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, who become gods, must also have been married for eternity in the temple (see D&C 131:1-4). All who inherit the celestial kingdom will live with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ forever (see D&C 76:62).

Through the work we do in temples, all people who have lived on the earth can have an equal opportunity to receive the fullness (sic) of the gospel and the ordinances of salvation so they can inherit a place in the highest degree of celestial glory.

### ***Terrestrial***

These are they who rejected the gospel on earth but afterward received it in the spirit world. These are the honorable people on the earth who were blinded to the gospel of Jesus Christ by the craftiness of men. These are also they who received the gospel and a testimony of Jesus but then were not valiant. They will be visited by Jesus Christ but not by our Heavenly Father. (See D&C 76:73-79.)

### ***Telestial***

These people did not receive the gospel or the testimony of Jesus either on earth or in the spirit world. They will suffer for their own sins in hell until after the Millennium, when they will be resurrected. "These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers, and whosoever loves and makes a lie." These people are as numerous as the stars in heaven and the sand on the seashore. They will be visited by the Holy Ghost but not by the Father or the Son. (See D&C 76:81-88, 103-6, 109.)

### ***Outer Darkness***

These are they who had testimonies of Jesus through the Holy Ghost and knew the power of the Lord but allowed Satan to overcome them. They denied the truth and defied the power of the Lord. There is no forgiveness for them, for they denied the Holy Spirit after having received it. They will not have a kingdom of glory. They will live in eternal darkness, torment, and misery with Satan and his angels forever. (See D&C 76:28-35, 44-48.)

## **8. The Church**

OUR WEB STATEMENT: The LDS strongly asserts that it is the one true church on the face of the earth. Joseph Smith claimed Jesus Christ told him to join none of the existing denominations because "they were all wrong ... that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt" (PGP: Joseph Smith-History 1:19-20). Mormons claim only the LDS possesses the divine authority of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood as restored by God to Joseph Smith in 1829. Thus, full salvation can only be attained by being a faithful and active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (D&C 13; 27:8-13; 107:1-20; PGP: Joseph Smith-History 1:68-73).

LDS GOSPEL PRINCIPLES (2011 ed.): In the spring of 1820, one of the most important events in the history of the world occurred. The time had come for the marvelous work and wonder of which the Lord had spoken. As a young boy, Joseph Smith wanted to know which of all the churches was the true Church of Jesus Christ. He went into the woods near his home and prayed humbly and intently to his Heavenly Father, asking which church he should join. On that morning a miraculous thing happened. Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith. The Savior told him not to join any church because the true Church was not on the earth. He also said that the creeds of present churches were "an abomination in his sight" (Joseph Smith-History 1:19; see also verses 7-18, 20). Beginning with this event, there was again direct revelation from the heavens. The Lord had chosen a new prophet. Since that time the heavens have not been closed. Revelation continues to this day through each of His chosen prophets. Joseph was to be the one to help restore the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusions

The LDS may have altered or softened to some extent the language it uses in its public theological statements to resemble orthodox Christianity. Nonetheless, as our analysis of the most current official LDS doctrinal manual Gospel Principles (2011 edition) indicates, Mormon teaching has not changed in any significant measure from that which it has published for more than a hundred years (as we documented in my 1997 book and on our website). The LDS doctrine of God is still that God the Heavenly Father has a body of flesh and bone and is the literal progenitor of the human race. The LDS doctrine of Jesus Christ is still that he was the firstborn child of Heavenly Father in the preexistence and the only-begotten son of the Father in the flesh on earth. These, and the other standard teachings outlined above are fully outside the bounds of, and are incompatible with, historic Christian orthodoxy.

If the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seriously desires to be considered as an authentic Christian denomination then its leaders will need to make sweeping reforms of its current theological and ecclesiastical dogma. To start with they will need to retract their long-standing claim to be the only true church and cease their aggressive missionary efforts to proselytize Christians. They will also need to recant of their unorthodox extra-biblical doctrines. We are not optimistic that the LDS leaders would be willing to make such changes, or, even if they desired to do so, that it could be done without them forfeiting the authority they claim over their people. Inevitably it would lead to major schisms in their ranks.

### Would You Consider Supporting Us?

Would you consider financial support for **MarketFaith Ministries**? I feel confident that what we are doing is consistent with your beliefs about spreading the gospel and equipping the saints for ministry. Would you let us be one element of your hands and feet in this process? **MarketFaith Ministries** is a 501 (c) (3) not for profit corporation, so your contributions are tax deductible. If you would consider this we would be very grateful. Also, if you would like to know more about the ministry, it would be my pleasure to share with you personally what we are working on and how you can plug in. I can be reached at 850-383-9756 or by e-mail at [Freddy@marketfaith.org](mailto:Freddy@marketfaith.org). As for any donations, they may be sent directly to **MarketFaith Ministries** at 321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312, or you can contribute through our secure website at [www.marketfaith.org](http://www.marketfaith.org). Simply click on the "Donate" button at the bottom of the homepage. We are deeply grateful for your support of this ministry.

And, as always, if you have any thoughts, opinions or suggestions about how **MarketFaith Ministries** can help you, please feel free, at any time, to call (850-383-9756) or e-mail ([info@marketfaith.org](mailto:info@marketfaith.org)). We are here to serve you.