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Why I Am Not a Mormon: Part 3

By Tal Davis

In 1973, I was confronted by two young missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS/Mormons). I was still somewhat of a young believer, but had learned a lot of Christian doctrine since my conversion in late 1968. At first, as I listened to the two men, both students at Brigham Young University, I thought they sounded pretty good. They used common Christian terms and talked about God the Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. However, as our discussion went on, it became clear to me that we were actually talking apples and oranges. I realized that what the LDS men were saying was totally incompatible with what I believed the Bible taught.

In my last two installments I related how, as I delved further into what Mormonism teaches, I became aware that the LDS has entirely different concepts of who God is and what He is like. (See <http://www.marketfaith.org/2019/07/why-i-am-not-a-mormon-part-1>, and <http://www.marketfaith.org/2019/07/why-i-am-not-a-mormon-part-2>) I also saw that our beliefs about Jesus are completely unlike. In this third installment I will explain what I discovered about the Mormon concept of sin and the Fall of humanity, and how Mormonism says mankind can be saved. When I learned what Mormonism teaches on these issues I was astonished. I think you will see, again, why I am not a Mormon.

The Mormon Concept of the Fall

Historically, based on Biblical teaching, Christians have believed that all human beings since Adam have chosen to sin against God. This fact, re-

ferred to by theologians as the Fall, asserts that all humans are sinners, are cut off from God, and bound for hell. It was the worst thing that has ever happened since it brought sin, death, and evil into the world (see Genesis 3).

When I talked to the missionaries and other Mormons, I found that their church teaches that Adam's Fall was actually part of Heavenly Father's plan all along. In their view, Adam's sin was a good thing. This, I thought, was incredible. How could man's fall from a perfect relationship with God be good? The answer, I learned, is found in the LDS' extra-biblical scriptures. As we discussed in Part 1, The Book of Moses, found in the *Pearl of Great Price*, is a section of the book of Genesis that Joseph Smith claimed to miraculously correct. In one passage of it, Eve is reported as saying, "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" (*Pearl of Great Price*, Moses 5:11; see also the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 2:22-25).

In Mormonism, the Fall caused a loss of immortality for all humanity, but, nonetheless, was necessary in order for mankind to reproduce and advance. If Adam had not fallen and had remained immortal, we would not be here, nor could people progress to godhood. You ask, "Why is that? I've never seen that in the Bible." That is because it is not in there. Nonetheless, Mormon doctrine, as taught in the LDS' temples and scriptures, maintains that, before the Fall, Elohim gave Adam and Eve two conflicting commandments. One was to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (and therefore become cursed and mortal) and the other

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was to multiply and fill the earth (which they could not do if they remained immortal).

This doctrine really baffled me. I learned that in Mormonism, if Adam and Eve had remained immortal by obeying the first command, they would not have been able to fulfill the second command. In that case, all Heavenly Father's spirit children would have been stuck forever in the preexistent spirit world (see Part 2). Therefore, Adam and Eve were heroes for disobeying God. So how did I respond to all this?

First of all, I knew that nothing in the Bible indicates anything about a preexistent spirit world. It also says nothing about God giving two contradictory commands to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Why would He even do that? Did God actually want Adam and Eve to sin? Talk about a Catch-22. In any case, the Bible does not teach that the Fall was necessary to fulfill God's desire for them to populate the earth. There is no indication that their having children could not have happened had they not sinned.

This led me to wonder, just what else does Mormonism teach about sin and how we are saved from it? Just what did Jesus accomplish?

Mormon Salvation

Historic Christian doctrine says that salvation is a gift. It is made possible only by God's grace through Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross and resurrection. We do not deserve it nor can we earn it. We receive it by repenting of our sins and putting our faith in Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior (see John 1:12; Rom. 3:20; 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-10).

In my research I saw that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does believe people

sin. But, however, not because they have a sinful nature, as historic Christianity teaches, but by willful disobedience to God's laws because they are mortal beings. Thus, Mormons do believe an atonement was necessary in order to recover what was lost in the Fall.

That is where Jesus came into the Mormon Heavenly Father's plan. Jesus' atonement restored the immortality that was lost in the Fall (and that is all it did). According to LDS doctrine, Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, death on the cross, and resurrection, guaranteed that all people, whether or not they are Mormons, Christians, or anything else (even atheists), will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns. Thus, I concluded that in one sense Mormonism is a form of universalism. Everyone will be saved to one extent or another. This is known as "unconditional" or "general" salvation.

But this basic atonement by Christ, according to Mormonism, is only the first step to determine one's ultimate eternal destiny. That destiny depends on one's works of righteousness, and standing within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – the one true church on the earth. This is called "conditional" or "individual" salvation.

The ultimate form of salvation, in Mormonism, is called Exaltation. That, I was shocked to learn, means a person may become a god like our Heavenly Father. That salvation is available only to faithful Mormons through moral living and obedience to strict LDS teachings. They must demonstrate obedience through faith, baptism (only in the LDS), receiving of the Holy Ghost, receiving the endowments (secret rituals conducted only in LDS temples), celestial or eternal marriage (also conducted in temples), following the strict Mormon moral code, and tithing.

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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

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

Fax: 850-514-4571

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For more on the Mormon steps to salvation go to:

The Mormon "Twelve Step Program" to Exaltation: Part 1

(<http://www.marketfaith.org/2012/09/the-mormon-%e2%80%9ctwelve-step-program%e2%80%9d-to-exaltation-part-1>)

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(<http://www.marketfaith.org/the-mormon-%e2%80%9ctwelve-step-program%e2%80%9d-to-exaltation-part-2>)

I was surprised to know that only those Mormons who are extremely faithful in their personal morality and religious practice will be exalted. Most Mormons probably doubt they will make it. In any case, all people, Mormon or not (with only a few exceptions), will be consigned to one of three levels of glory depending on their church membership and life's behavior.

The first level is the Celestial Kingdom for faithful Mormons where people may become gods or angels. "Then shall they be gods" (*Doctrine & Covenants* [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). If they are not good enough to warrant exaltation, they may become angels (like Moroni) in service to Heavenly Father. But those good enough will receive special blessings of exaltation.

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 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]).

(These points are quoted from the official LDS manual *Gospel Principles*, 2011, p. 277. Available in pdf online at:

https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/06195_eng.pdf?lang=eng)

The second level of glory is the Terrestrial Kingdom. This place is not as glorious as the Celestial Kingdom but it will still be a wonderful place to spend eternity. This level is reserved for lukewarm Mormons and righteous non-Mormons. Good people of all religions who have lived moral lives will enjoy fellowship with Jesus (but not with 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" (*Doctrine & Covenants* 76:75-76).

The third level, called the Telestial Kingdom, is for wicked and ungodly people. It, too, 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.) It seemed strange to me that unrepentant evil-doers would be rewarded with a place in heaven.

So, as I discovered, everyone gets saved. Only very few people, along

with the devil and his rebellious angels (demons) will go to "Perdition" – eternal hell. Those rebellious angels were at one time 1/3 of Heavenly Father's multiple billions of children in the spirit world. However, they joined Lucifer (the devil) and rebelled against God in a pre-existence war in heaven. For more about the "War in Heaven" go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2012/06/the-mormon-saga>.

As I realized, this doctrine of three levels of glory (D&C 76) is troublesome. The LDS terms "Celestial" and "Terrestrial" glory are obviously taken from 1 Corinthians 15:40 in the KJV Bible. In that important chapter of his letter, Paul writes about the nature of our future resurrected bodies. He makes a contrast between our present "earthly bodies" (as rendered in the NASB, NIV, HCSB, et.al.) (KJV: terrestrial), and our future resurrected "heavenly bodies" (as in the NASB, NIV, HCSB, et.al.) (KJV: celestial).

There are also heavenly (KJV: celestial) bodies and earthly (KJV: terrestrial) bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. (1 Corinthians 15:40 [NASB] should be read in context of the full chapter.)

In High School I studied Latin, so I recognized that the KJV translators usage of those terms, "celestial" and "terrestrial," are English derivatives of the Latin translations of the Greek words *epourania* (heavenly) and *epigeia* (earthly). The KJV renderings and the actual Greek words Paul used have no reference at all to heavenly kingdoms as used in Mormonism. I reckoned the other term used – "telestial" – must have been invented by Joseph Smith since it does not appear in the Bible or any other literature.

Conclusion to Part Three

Clearly the LDS system of salvation has no basis in the New Testament. Mormons depend on Jesus' atonement only for their salvation from the affects of Adam's Fall (mortality). As I said, in that sense, they are universalists, since Jesus' atonement was effectual for everyone who ever lived. That being said, however, in Mormonism, full salvation beyond that baseline is determined by one's rank and good standing only in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! Nonetheless, non-Mormons will have a second chance to become members of the LDS after death through "baptism for the dead." In my mind, this presented serious problems. I saw that Mormons must rely more on their own personal righteousness, good works, marital status, and church membership for their ultimate salvation than on Jesus' atoning work.

For more about LDS "baptism for the dead" read these two articles:

Why Are Latter-day Saints So Obsessed with Genealogical Research? - Part 1

(<http://www.marketfaith.org/2017/07/why-are-latter-day-saints-so-obsessed-with-genealogical-research-part-1>)

Why Are Latter-day Saints So Obsessed with Genealogical Research? Part 2

(<http://www.marketfaith.org/2017/08/why-are-latter-day-saints-so-obsessed-with-genealogical-research-part-2>)

The Bible teaches that, at the Final Judgment, those who have trusted in Jesus Christ will inherit the fullness of eternal life in heaven with God. Those who have rejected Christ will suffer eternal separation from God's presence in hell. There is no indication in Scripture that salvation can be acquired after death (see Matt. 5:12-30; 25:41; Hebrews 9:27; Rev. 20-22).

Final Conclusions

I began this series with the observation that my experience in knowing people who were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was generally favorable. Most of them were kind, moral, and zealous for their faith. I discovered early that evangelical Christians actually have a lot in common with Mormons. Both have strong moral principles, and encourage good marriages and families. More than once I was invited to consider joining the LDS.

Admittedly, when I was very young it seemed like an actual possibility. As a young teen-ager I was not satisfied with the church I was in and was looking for a more authentic faith. Thankfully in my Junior year of High School, I was confronted with the notion that I needed to receive Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.

For most of my life, I had believed I had to measure up to certain standards of behavior to qualify to go to Heaven. Frankly, I was afraid I was failing miserably and might end up in hell. The most powerful aspect of turning to Christ for salvation was when I learned it was based entirely on grace through faith (Eph. 2:8,9).

Therefore, when I carefully examined the beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I knew I could never go back to a religious system so demanding and legalistic as that. Furthermore, as I have studied Mormonism for more than forty years, I have learned that so much of it is highly questionable theologically, historically, and practically. So, despite the positive qualities I saw in Mormons, for all the reasons detailed in this three part series, I am not a Mormon.

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