

Notes

Answering Mormons' Questions: Ready Responses for Inquiring Latter-day Saints

By Eric Johnson

The problem with sharing the Christian faith with Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is that we share many of the same terms yet have different meanings

Examples: God, Jesus, scripture, salvation

So how do we share our faith with Latter-day Saints?

Gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15-16)

With effort and hard work (2 Tim. 2:15)

With love (Eph. 4:14)

Using a book I coauthored with Bill McKeever titled *Answering Mormons' Questions* (Kregel, 2013), allow me to explain why it's important to have a good understanding of what a Mormon is taught on some of the basics.

Chapter 1: "Why won't you accept Mormons' as Christians? Do you think we're a cult?"

Questions you can use in reply to these questions:

Would you please define the meaning of "Christian"?

Why does it bother you that I, as a Christian, won't accept Mormonism as a part of Christianity?

Why do you think people assume that your religion is a "cult"?

Chapter 1 Summary:

"LDS Church leaders not only proclaim that theirs is a Christian organization, but they also insist that theirs is the only church with which God is pleased. Since even before the church was founded in 1830, incredible claims have been made that fall outside the parameters of biblical truth. Their views of the Godhead, salvation, and Scripture, along with many other doctrines, separate Mormons from the rest of the professing Christian world. And while Christians need to be respectful when discussing these topics, differences on central issues cannot be ignored. After all, truth matters."

Sixth LDS President Joseph F. Smith (1838-1918): "I contend that the Latter-day Saints are the only good and true Christians, that I know anything about in the world. There are a good many people who profess to be Christians, but they are not founded on the foundation that Jesus Christ himself has laid."--*Collected Discourses*, 2:305.

Seventy Gary J. Coleman, responding to 14-year-old Cortnee, the daughter of a mission president: "As a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you are a Christian, and I am too. I am a devout Christian who is exceedingly fortunate to have greater knowledge of the true 'doctrine of Christ' since my conversion to the restored Church. These truths define this Church as having the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I now understand the true nature of the Godhead, I have access to additional scripture and revelation, and I can partake of the blessings of priesthood authority. Yes, Cortnee, we are Christians." *Ensign*, May 2007, p. 94

Apostle Neil Anderson: "Some ask, 'Aren't there many of other faiths who love Christ?' Of course there are! However, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, having a witness of His reality not only from the Bible but also from the Book of Mormon; knowing His priesthood has been restored to the earth; having made sacred covenants to follow Him and received the gift of the Holy Ghost; having been endowed with power in His holy temple; and being part of preparing for His glorious return to the earth, we cannot compare what we are to be with those who have not yet received these truths." --"Be Thou an Example to the Believers," *Ensign*, November 2010, p. 41

When you say Mormonism is not “Christian,” a Mormon very likely hears: “Mormons are not good people.” This is because Mormons can associate “Christian” with “moralism.”

Tips when talking to a Latter-day Saint:

- Don't start off a conversation by saying “you're not a Christian” or “you belong to a cult”
- Avoid using “you” at the beginning of your sentence
- Keep voice inflection steady
- Be kind and smile a lot
- Don't think of the Mormon as the enemy (if Mormonism is not true, what is the kindest thing you could do)
- Don't be afraid to raise issues and, if you get stumped, say, “Could I get back to you on that?”
- Don't tell the Mormon what he/she believes. Rather, ask lots of questions

Differentiating Mormonism from Christianity

- Who is God? (i.e. Nature of God, Jesus, Trinity)
- Was a restoration of Christianity needed?
- Where does a person get authority?
- What does “saved” mean?
- Hence, what beliefs are needed for a person to be called “Christian”

Robert D. Hales gave a General Conference talk titled “Being a More Christian Christian,” found in the *Ensign*, November 2012, pp. 90-92 (delivered Oct. 7, 2012). Using that talk, let's consider what he said.

Who is God/Jesus?

“A Christian has faith in the Lord **Jesus Christ**, that He is the literal Son of God, sent by **His Father** to suffer for our sins in the supreme act of love we know as the **Atonement**.”

Jesus: “God the Father's firstborn son and humanity's eldest brother. Prior to his incarnation, he was known as Jehovah.”

God the Father: “Also known as Heavenly Father, or Elohim. He was once a righteous human in another realm who died and then became God of this world He has a tangible body of flesh and bones (D&C 130:22).”

Atonement: “Provided by Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross, allowing humankind to have a resurrection, as well as paving the way for potential exaltation.”

“Through the scriptures and the witness of Joseph Smith, we know that God, our Heavenly Father, has a glorified and perfected body of flesh and bone. Jesus Christ is His Only Begotten Son in the flesh. The Holy Spirit is a personage of spirit whose work is to testify of the Father and the Son. The Godhead is three separate and distinct beings, unified in purpose.”

Holy Spirit/Holy Ghost: “A son of God the Father, as well as a brother of Jesus Christ.”

Godhead: “Three gods—God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost—who, while distinct in being, are one in purpose.”

From *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 345: “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!” And “We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see.”

How could such a notion be imagined?

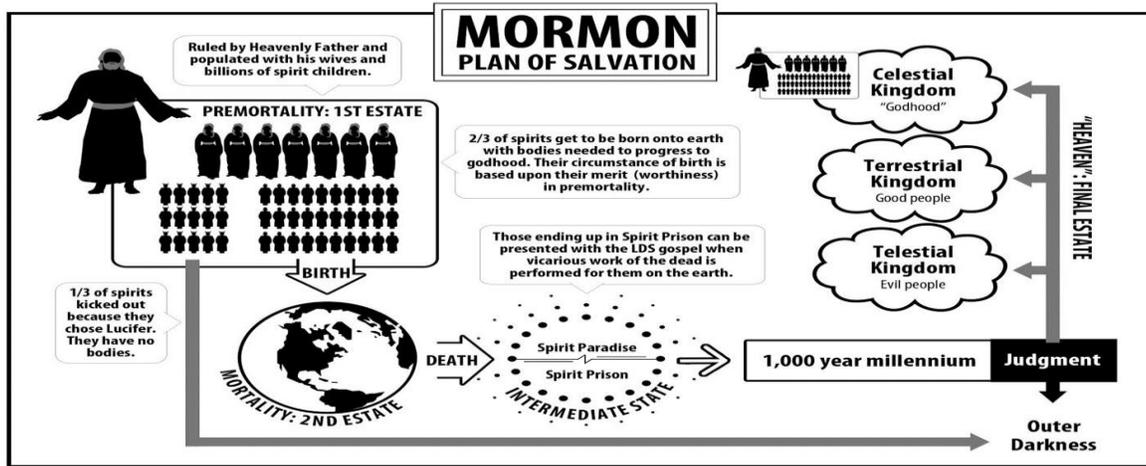
Moroni 8:18 – “For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable, from all eternity to all eternity.”

Psalms 90:2 – “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

Doctrine and Covenants 20:17 – “By these things we know that there is a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth and all things which are in them.”

“But there was a time when our God was not God.” Ronald R. Zollinger, *Mere Mormonism: A Defense of Mormon Theology*, 2010, p. 90

“We believe in a God who is Himself progressive, whose majesty is intelligence; whose perfection consists in eternal advancement -- a Being who has attained His exalted state by a path which now His children are permitted to follow, whose glory it is their heritage to share ... the Church proclaims the eternal truth: ‘As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be.’” -- Apostle James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, pp. 442-443



“As a church we have critics, many of them. They say we do not believe in the traditional Christ of Christianity. There is some substance to what they say.” --President Gordon B. Hinckley, LDS Conference 4/7/2002

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost.”-- *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p.7. See also the *Church News*, December 18, 2004, p. 16.

“At this point, discuss in your own words how Jesus was the only begotten Son of God. You might do this using the following illustration on a chalkboard or piece of paper.” --*Family Home Evening Manual*, 1972, p. 126

Salvation

“A Christian believes that through the grace of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, we can **repent**, forgive others, keep the **commandments**, and inherit **eternal life**.”

Repentance: “The process by which a member receives forgiveness. True repentance involves six steps, including confession and a successful abandonment of sins.”

Commandments: “Laws and rules as taught by the LDS Church.”

Eternal life: “Gaining exaltation in the highest level of the celestial kingdom and living forever in the family unit.”

“Eternal life hangs in the balance awaiting the works of men. This progress toward eternal life is a matter of achieving perfection. Living all the commandments guarantees total forgiveness and assures one of exaltation... incomplete repentance never brought complete forgiveness.”-- 12th President Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, pp.208, 212

“Your Heavenly Father has promised forgiveness upon total repentance and meeting all the requirements, but that forgiveness is not granted merely for the asking. There must be works—many works—and an all-out, total surrender, with a great humility and ‘a broken heart and a contrite spirit’.....It depends upon you whether or not you are forgiven, and when. It could be weeks, it could be years, it could be centuries before that happy day when you have the positive assurance that the Lord has forgiven you. That depends on your humility, your sincerity, your works, your attitudes.” --12th President Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, pp. 208, 212

“The Lord loves our righteousness but asks of us continued repentance and submission. . . . This is the exchange the Savior is asking of us: we are to give up all our sins, big or small, for the Father’s reward of eternal life. We are to forget self-justifying stories, excuses, rationalizations, defense mechanisms, procrastinations, judgmental thoughts, and doing things our way. We are to separate ourselves from all worldliness and take upon us the image of God in our countenances.” --Seventy Robert C. Gay, October 2012 General Conference, “What Shall a Man Give in Exchange for His Soul?”

Quoting D&C 110:13-16: “Denying ourselves of ungodly behavior is the beginning of repentance, which brings a mighty change of heart until ‘we have no more disposition to do evil.’”

Moroni 10:32: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.”

D&C 58:43: “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.”

“The word Christian denotes taking upon us the name of Christ. We do this by being **baptized** and receiving the **gift of the Holy Ghost** by the **laying on of hands** by those holding His **priesthood** authority.”

Water baptism: “Required for remission of sins (baptismal regeneration). Performed by immersion and valid only if administered by a Mormon male holding priesthood authority.”

Gift of the Holy Ghost: “Fullness of blessing available to LDS members after water baptism. The Holy Ghost remains with those who stay worthy, though He will withdraw when the commandments are not kept.”

Laying on of hands: “The act of priesthood leaders putting their hands on the head of a person to bestow a blessing.”

Priesthood: “There are two divisions: Aaronic and Melchizedek. Authority to hold the priesthood is for male members only.”

“A Christian knows that throughout the ages, God’s prophets have always testified of Jesus Christ. This same Jesus, accompanied by Heavenly Father, appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the year 1820 and **restored the gospel** and the organization of His original Church.”

Restoration: “Reestablishment of true gospel principles.”

Gospel: “All doctrines, principles, laws, ordinances, and covenants necessary for a Mormon to receive exaltation.”

“We claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God and the only true Church on the earth. It is called the Church of Jesus Christ because He stands at the head; it is His Church, and all these things are possible because of His atoning sacrifice. We believe that these distinguishing features can be found in no other place or organization on this earth. As good and sincere as other religions and churches are, none of them have the authority to provide the ordinances of salvation that are available in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”—Bonnie Oscarson, “Do I Believe?” *Ensign*, May 2016

“With these doctrines as the foundation of our faith, can there be any doubt or disputation that we, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are Christian?”

B.B. Warfield: “If everything that is called Christianity in these days is Christianity, then there is no such thing as Christianity. A name applied indiscriminately to everything, designates nothing.”