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The Six Big Problems of Mormonism: Part 2

By Tal Davis

Ironically, as I was working on this article, my door-bell rang, and standing there were two young men representing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS/Mormons). One of them was from Arizona and the other from Utah. They were just two of more than 80,000 such missionaries working around the world trying to make converts to that church. I noticed that they identified themselves as "missionaries for Christ." Time was, and not so long ago, that LDS missionaries rarely referred to themselves as Christians. Today the LDS wants very much to be regarded as a Christian church.

The missionary's presence, and their claim to be Christian, reminded me why it is important to educate evangelicals how those claims are, at best, troublesome. I wasn't able to talk with them that day, but I don't doubt the sincerity of the two boys at my door. They quite likely do not understand the issues that conflict historic Mormonism with historic Christianity.

In this two part series we are analyzing six of the major problems with Mormonism. In part one we examined the issues of the LDS's history, authority system, and cosmology. (Read it at this link: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2016/01/the-six-big-problems-of-mormonism-part-1>.) In this second installment we will examine Mormonism's problem of theology, as well as those of anthropology, and soteriology.

4. The Theological Problem

Theology is the study of the nature of deity. That is to say, it is the systematic analysis of what a

person, movement, major religion, or church, believes (or disbelieves) about the existence and nature of their god or gods. Historic Christianity, based on what is revealed in the Old Testament, and more fully revealed in the New Testament, believes only one eternal and infinite God exists. He is Yahweh (I AM), Elohim (the LORD God), the infinite, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the universe, including all time, space, matter, and energy. God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. (see Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10-11)

The New Testament informs us that the infinite God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is one God in three Persons – the Trinity (see Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:3-14).

Jesus is the eternal, preexistent Word of God. He is the second Person of the Holy Trinity. He was, is, and always shall be God. In His earthly life, Jesus had two natures: human and divine. He lived a perfect, sinless life, and was crucified on a Roman cross between two thieves as a substitutionary atonement for mankind's sin. Jesus rose from the dead, physically, on the third day, and is ascended to heaven (see John 1:1-18; 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-33; 17:5; Col. 1:15-17; 2:9).

Likewise, the New Testament indicates that the Holy Spirit is both a person and fully God. He is capable of speaking, teaching, grieving, and being lied to (but not being fooled). (see Matt. 12:31-32; 28:19; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:12; John 14-16; Acts 5:3-10; 13:2-4; Rom. 8:4, 26-27; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 2:18-19; 4:30; 5:18-21)

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Those theological concepts are affirmed by every major branch of historic Christianity, including Evangelical, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox. They are the essential, full, and final truth about the nature of God. They are non-negotiable for any individual, movement, organization, or church to be regarded as authentically Christian. That being said, they are not the theological positions of historic Mormonism!

The LDS founder, Joseph Smith, Jr., taught, on numerous occasions, that God (who Mormons affectionately call "Heavenly Father") is actually an exalted man (male human being) with a physical body of flesh and bone. Smith said, "If the veil

were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible - I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form" (Joseph Fielding Smith: Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1977. p. 345). Not only that, but Heavenly Father is married and has a wife (or wives) who is our Heavenly Mother.

The LDS historically has asserted that God was once a man like we are on another world who had a Heavenly Father and Mother of his own. Since he was worthy, his god elevated him to godhood to procreate and populate his own planet (earth) and to be our Heavenly Father.

It is important to understand that Mormonism strongly opposes the historic Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. In Mormonism, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are 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" (Doctrine and Covenants [D&C] 130:22). Furthermore, Mormonism is polytheistic, believing there are, along with these three, innumerable other gods in the universe. In addition, Mormonism teaches that humans can also attain godhood just as did our Heavenly Father, if they fulfill all the necessary requirements (see Problem Six below).

Though Mormons strongly claim to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, their understanding of who He was, and is, contradicts historic Christian Christology. LDS theology says Jesus was the spiritual "firstborn" Son of God in the preexistence. "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

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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).

"Every person who was ever born on earth is our spirit brother or sister. Because we are the spirit children of God, we have inherited the potential to develop His divine qualities. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can become like our Heavenly Father and receive a fulness of joy." (Gospel Principles [2011], The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

<https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-2-our-heavenly-family?lang=eng>)

"And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn" (D&C 93:21). What they mean is that Jesus was literally the "firstborn" human being born to the Heavenly Father and his wife in the pre-existent, pre-earth life. After him, billions of other spirit children were born to the Heavenly Parents. Those children are you and me, and all other human beings, past, present, and future. Thus, Jesus was, as Mormons like to say, our "elder brother."

Jesus, however, 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" (Gospel Principles [GP] [2011], The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-11-the-life-of-christ?lang=eng>). Thus, according to Mormon doctrine, 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.

This perspective is problematic for three basic reasons. One difficulty is that the New Testament does not teach anything about a pre-earth birth and life for human beings, or about a Mother God in Heaven. These were unbiblical ideas developed by Joseph Smith in his extra-biblical scriptures.

Second, the term "firstborn" (Greek: *prototokos*), as used in the New Testament, does not mean the first born in time (except in Luke 2:7 in reference to Mary's first time to give birth), but means Christ is the highest in authority or pre-eminence above all things (see Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5).

Third, the phrase traditionally translated in the King James Version (KJV) Bible, and some other versions, as "only begotten Son" (Greek: *monogenes hyios*, as in John 3:16), is better translated as "one and only Son," or simply "only Son." Most newer translations render it that way in order to clarify its actual meaning (see NIV, HCSB, NRSV, et. al.). The LDS church uses the KJV (the LDS's official Bible version), to describe Jesus being physically sired by Heavenly Father and Mary. That usage not only misconstrues the meaning of the phrase in the KJV, but also implies a relationship between them that is offensive to Christian sensibilities.

The inescapable conclusion of all this analysis of Mormon theology is that its concepts of God and the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) are totally outside the doctrinal bounds of historic Christianity. The LDS has unbiblical concepts of God the Father, the nature and work of Jesus Christ, and nature of the Holy Spirit.

This presents an insurmountable problem for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints if it ever intends to gain acceptance as a genuine Christian church.

5. The Anthropological Problem

The LDS theological problem leads inevitably to the anthropological problem of Mormonism. Anthropology is the study of the nature human beings. In science it involves researching the various habitats, customs, cultures, and races of mankind throughout the world. In theological studies anthropology refers to the spiritual and philosophical nature of humanity as it relates to God.

The Bible teaches that all human beings are created in God's image, meaning they have personal qualities similar to God's (see Gen. 1:26-27). People can think rationally, have personal relationships, make decisions, and understand right and wrong. God's image does not mean we are like Him physically, since He does not have a physical body (John 4: 24). Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity and worth. The Bible gives no indication that people exist prior to their physical conception.

Mormonism however, teaches that all people are the preexistent spiritual offspring of the Heavenly Father and Mother in what they call the "First Estate." "All men and women are ... literally the sons and daughters of Deity.... 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" (Joseph F. Smith, "The Origin of Man," Improvement Era, Nov. 1909, pp. 78, 80, as quoted in GP). Mormonism says humans are born basically good and are "gods in embryo." A commonly quoted Mormon aphorism (attributed to fifth LDS president Lorenzo Snow) says "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

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. Furthermore, men may aspire to become like Heavenly Father and be exalted "as gods of their own worlds."

Christians believe, beginning with Adam's Fall, that all human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature and pursuing a life opposed to His essential character and revealed law. This is called the doctrine of Original Sin. It basically says

that we are all sinners and are cut off from our relationship with God and bound for hell. We cannot save ourselves and are in desperate need of redemption that only God can supply (see Genesis 3; Rom. 3:23; 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8-10).

The LDS, incredibly, asserts that Adam's Fall was actually part of Heavenly Father's plan all along. It caused a loss of immortality for all humanity but, nonetheless, was necessary for mankind to reproduce and advance. 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" (Pearl of Great Price, Moses 5:11; see also the Book of Mormon, 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.

Why? Because according to Mormon doctrine, as taught in the LDS's temples, God gave Adam two conflicting commandments. One was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (and therefore become mortal), and the other was to multiply and fill the earth. If Adam and Eve had remained immortal by obeying the first command, they would not have been able to fulfill the second command. Thus, all Heavenly Father's spirit children would have been stuck forever in the preexistent First Estate. (Note: Nothing in the Bible indicates anything about a "First Estate," that the two commands contradict one another, or that the Fall was necessary to fulfill God's desire for them to populate the earth.)

Therefore, this means Mormon anthropology is problematic and incoherent, as it implies that God wanted Adam and Eve to disobey his command. 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. Mormons do believe an atonement is necessary in order to recover the immortality lost in the Fall. But that is only the beginning of the salvation process in Mormonism.

6. The Soteriological Problem

In Christian theology, salvation is release from the guilt and power of sin through God's gift of grace. It is provided only through Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross and resurrection, and is received by personal faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. There is nothing we can do to deserve it or earn it. Salvation

is entirely a work of God because of His love and grace. 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 Mormonism, Jesus' atonement restored the immortality lost in the Fall for all people. 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 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. Thus, salvation 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.

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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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.

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). Mormonism, however, 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" (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).

"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 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). (GP [2011]: <https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-47-exaltation?lang=eng>)

According to LDS doctrine, baptism for the dead by proxy provides post-mortem salvation for dead non-Mormons who desire it. It is "by immersion performed by a living person for one who is dead. This ordinance is performed in temples." Other temple ordinances necessary for salvation can also be done by proxy for those who have died, including eternal marriage.

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.

The LDS doctrine of three levels of glory (D&C 76) is highly problematic. The LDS texts borrow the terms "celestial," and "terrestrial" from 1 Corinthians 15:40 in the KJV Bible. There Paul contrasts "earthly bodies" (NASB, NIV, HCSB, et.al.) (KJV: terrestrial) to resurrected "heavenly bodies" (NASB, NIV, HCSB, et.al.) (KJV: celestial). The KJV usage of the terms are English derivatives of the Latin translations of the Greek words *epourania* (heavenly) and *epigeia* (earthly). The Greek words have no reference to heavenly kingdoms as used in Mormonism. The term "telestial" was coined by Joseph Smith and does not appear in the Bible or any other literature.

Clearly the LDS system of salvation is completely out of sync with the New Testament. Mormons depend on Jesus' atonement only for their salvation from the affects of the Fall (immortality). In that sense, they are universalists, since Jesus' atonement was effectual for everyone who ever lived. However, in the Mormon system, full salvation is determined by one's status in the LDS church, either before or after death. This presents serious problems in that, while Mormons regard themselves as Christians, they rely more on their own personal righteousness, good works, marital status, and church membership for their ultimate salvation than on Jesus' atoning work.

Conclusion

In these two installments we have examined and analyzed six major problems of historic Mormonism. We looked at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' early history, authority system, cosmology, theology, anthropology, and soteriology. In each case we demonstrated why Mormonism has enormous credibility problems.

We may respect lifestyles of Mormon people and the dedication of LDS missionaries like the two who came to my door. However, our conclusions must remain: Mormonism's essential doctrines are not true and it is as not an authentic Christian system. Therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' claim to be the true church of Jesus Christ is without validity.

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