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Salvation in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

By Tal Davis

[**Note:** The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints now prefers to be called officially simply the Church of Jesus Christ. However, we will continue to use its traditional abbreviation of LDS to differentiate it from other churches. Also, we will occasionally still refer to members of the church by their traditional nickname of Mormons and its historic theological teachings as Mormonism.]

In a previous article, I reviewed the place of temples in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We discussed how the three main temple ceremonies of baptisms for the dead, the endowments, and temple marriages are all important aspects for members of the LDS to attain the highest levels of salvation in their belief system.

"The *highest* levels?" you might ask. "Does that mean there are lower levels people might attain to or arrive at?" The answer to that question is yes. In the Mormon doctrinal system, eternal salvation comes in several different levels and classes. It all depends on what a person does or does not do in this life, or what someone else does for them after they die. If you are an evangelical Christian, you may be a bit confused at this point, so let's look at it.

Before we do that, however, we need to explain a bit about the Mormon concepts of life-before-life and life-after-death. In the Mormon belief system, every human being was born into a pre-existent spiritual life without a physical body to the Heav-

enly Father God and his wife our Heavenly Mother. This begins a process they call "eternal progression," which, if completed, can result in a person becoming equal to God himself. However, because humans in that "first estate" do not have physical bodies, they cannot progress any further if they remain there. So the Heavenly Father designed a plan by which his children could be born into the physical world and receive bodies in order to progress upward to godhood just as he did eons ago. Yes, God was once a man just like we are now but earned his way to become our Heavenly Father.

So God sent two of his best pre-born spirit children to earth in immortal bodies to be Adam and Eve. He put them in the Garden of Eden and gave them two contradictory commands. One was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because if they did they would lose their immortality and die. The other command was to multiply and fill the earth with people. However, since they had immortal bodies they could not fulfill the second command (why is not explained). Therefore, when they ate of the forbidden fruit and fell from immortality, it allowed them and all their posterity to become mortal and begin the process of physical reproduction. So, in Mormonism, the Fall was a good thing.

Salvation then, in Mormon theology, involves two aspects. The first phase is the restoration of immortality to the human race that was lost in the Fall. That part is called General Salvation. The second facet, called Individual Salvation, is the process of working toward "exaltation," which is contingent on one's personal righteousness, membership in the LDS church, and faithfulness in doing certain required duties in the

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church. How one measures up in this second dimension will determine in which level of glory one will spend eternity.

In Mormonism there are three levels of heavenly glory: 1. The Telestial Kingdom – which is the lowest level for wicked and unjust people; 2. The Terrestrial Kingdom – for unworthy Mormons and righteous living non-Mormons; and 3. The Celestial Kingdom, which contains the highest levels of glory a person may attain – including even becoming a god. This is only for faithful righteous Mormons who have completed all the necessary requirements.

In Mormonism perdition, or hell, is reserved for Satan and the 1/3 of the preexistent spirit children who followed him in rebellion against the Heavenly Father in the Great War in Heaven. It also is for apostates from the LDS church, but this is rarely discussed.

Now let's look more specifically at the key LDS salvation points.

General Salvation

In Mormonism, the first kind of salvation is known as "General Salvation." This salvation is for all people for all time. It was provided by Jesus Christ (a second Mormon God who is God the Father's only physically begotten Son). When Adam and Eve sinned (which Mormon's believe was necessary so they could reproduce children), it caused them to lose immortality and die physically. Therefore, since then, all people die. However, by his suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus atoned for Adam's sin and restored immortality to all humanity. Thus, we will all be raised from the dead in the end times. Now it is important to understand that this salvation is unconditional and does not require faith

in God or Jesus for it to be effectual. So in a sense, the LDS is a universalist faith since everyone will be saved from the effects of the Fall.

But that is not the complete story of salvation in the Mormon system. Much more can be attained in the life to come but only for those who are in the LDS church. So how does one get those extra benefits?

Individual Salvation *Repentance and Baptism*

First, one must repent of his or her sins and be duly baptized as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If a child is born into a Mormon family, he or she is recognized and counted as a "member of record." Nevertheless, when a child is about seven years old, he or she is formally baptized in a local Ward (church) building. The baptism by immersion must be performed by a male member holding the lower-level Aaronic Priesthood to be considered valid. If someone converts to the church, he or she must be baptized as soon as possible by an Aaronic priest to join what Mormons consider to be the one true church.

Receiving the Holy Ghost

The next step after baptism, which is done soon afterward, is called the laying on hands for the receiving of the Holy Ghost. This ritual is performed by male members of the higher-level Melchizedek Priesthood. It is believed that at this point, the Holy Ghost (a third Mormon God after the Heavenly Father and Jesus) comes to dwell in the person.

Ordination to the Priesthoods

Next, when a young man reaches the appropriate ages he will be ordained to the two Mormon priesthoods. The lower level priesthood is the Aaronic, which is bestowed at about age eleven. The higher priesthood is the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which is usually bestowed at age eighteen or nineteen

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before an individual male goes on a mission or gets married in the temple.

Temple Work

The next step in the Mormon "eternal progression" salvation process takes place in the Mormon temples. We discussed at length the rituals practiced in temples in a previous article. To read it go to: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2024/05/whats-with-the-new-latter-day-saints-temples-tal-davis/>. In this article we will briefly review each of those ceremonies and how they fit in to the process of Mormon salvation.

- Baptism for the Dead is when a living Mormon goes to a temple to be baptized on behalf of a dead person who may repent and join the church after death while in spirit prison.
- The Endowments are a series of blessings, lessons, and rituals taught to worthy church members in the temples. There they learn the true story of the creation and fall of Adam and Eve. They also learn a series of words, symbolic arm and hand motions (called "tokens" and "signs") and are given blessings necessary to know in order to enter the Celestial Kingdom.
- Temple Marriages are marriage ceremonies conducted in special rooms with special altars where Mormon men and women take their vows to be "sealed" together for time and eternity. In Mormonism having a good family and marriage is essential for attaining exaltation to godhood in the Celestial Kingdom. If one attains godhood a man will take his wife and procreate spirit children who will populate another world where he and she will be their heavenly father and mother god.

Sustain the Prophet

Sustaining the Prophet is simply agreeing that the President of the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a true Prophet, Seer, and Revelator capable of receiving direct revelation from God. Every year at the church's annual World Conference held in Salt Lake City, Utah, all members present are asked to raise their hands in agreement to sustain the prophet's authority. Publically criticizing or disagreeing with the President or the church's General Authorities on matters of church doctrine or ecclesiastical policies is considered a serious error. It could lead to a church trial and excommunication.

Tithing

Giving is another obligation that Mormons are expected to exercise to stay on the road to exaltation. Tithing means donating at least ten percent of one's income to the church each year. It is a requirement for members to maintain their temple recommend to enter the LDS temples. Each year members are expected to give evidence to their local Bishop that have been faithful in this regard. If they have fallen short they must make up the difference as soon as possible.

The "Word of Wisdom"

The high Mormon ethical code that church members are expected to follow throughout their lives is the Word of Wisdom. This includes keeping sexually pure before marriage, being faithful in marriage, avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, and not drinking beverages containing caffeine. In other words, living a clean and wholesome lifestyle.

The Weekly Sacrament Meetings

Faithful Mormons are expected to attend the regular Sunday worship services called Sacrament Meetings conducted in buildings constructed for that purpose. They are not temples. The services consist of music, singing, spoken messages, and the sacrament meal (Lord's supper) of water and bread. Good Mormons

attend as often as possible and participate in the life of the congregation. A local LDS organized congregation is called a Ward which is led by a Bishop and a board of elders who are all holders of the priesthoods. There are no paid clergy.

So these are the steps to salvation in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They may say they believe their salvation is through Jesus Christ, but in their system that consists only of being saved from the effects of the Fall, i.e. mortality. The rest falls on the shoulders of the individual to accomplish the complex legalistic moral and religious duties specified by the Mormon church system. As Bible believing Evangelical Christians, we must stand on the truth that salvation is entirely based on the finished work of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. There is no need for membership in any specific church organization or special temples, and there are no higher or lower levels of heaven. And, we can never become gods. We cannot, nor need not, add anything to what Jesus has already done for us. We are saved by God's grace through our faith in Him alone.

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