



A Closer Look

at the Mormon Plan of Salvation

“But they use words just like ours—*gospel, savior, atonement, virgin birth*. In fact, don't they also baptize by immersion, send out missionaries, and talk about the gospel? It seems that their view of salvation is just like Baptists and other evangelicals! Isn't that the case?”

This is often the response to Mormonism and the practices of the Mormon church. On the surface, much of what Mormons do seems similar to Bible-based Christian denominations. What they believe, however, is not at all in correspondence to the Bible. Nowhere is this fact more evident than when the question: “What must I do to be saved?” is asked. The Bible gives a very clear and simple answer to that inquiry: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all thy heart and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). This answer is one that Baptists would affirm and support. The *Baptist Faith and Message* states simply: “Salvation . . . is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer.”¹ It is acquired when the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith with the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing less and nothing more is required.

Let's break that concept down into four parts: First, salvation is of God—the one and only God of this and all other possible universes. He is uncreated, without a beginning, and by whom all things are created. He loved the world and sent His son, God the Word, to die for our sins (see John 3:16 and 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. He was born, lived a sinless life, was

crucified for the sins of the world, and was raised victorious on the third day.

Second, the biblical and Christian concept of Jesus is that He existed eternally in heaven as God the Word. He is uncreated as the second person of the Triune God. There is no biblical material to substantiate, neither have Christians ever believed, that He was born a spirit child to “Heavenly Father” in a preexistent realm as the Mormons teach. He is not our nor Lucifer's “elder brother.”

Third, because humankind is sinful and fallen, all of us stand in need of the saving grace of Jesus Christ for all of our sins and not just Adam's original sin. God's forgiveness and transforming power are available to all who put their trust in Christ (see John 1:11-13; John 3:16-36).

Fourth, we must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, as we repent of all sin. John 1:12 states, “To as many as received Him to them He gave the power to become the sons of God even to them who believe in His name.” Works, denominational identity, or good intentions have nothing to do with one's saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Faith, trust, and belief in Jesus' saving death on the cross when He took the sins of the world on himself and suffered for them, is the only basis for redemption (see 1 John 5:13; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9).

How does Mormonism compare with the above plan? It is quite different and involves for the fullest sense of salvation at least twelve steps for the male member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons believe that everyone will experience salvation in some way. While the Bible affirms only the presence of heaven or hell, Mormonism maintains that there is perdition, or hell, which is reserved for murderers, apostates from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Devil and his angels. Mormon theology also maintains the existence of three heavens, all of them superior to this life—the celestial, terrestrial, and telestial kingdoms. The celestial kingdom is of the highest order where the Mormon will achieve exaltation or godhood.² The following steps explain the Mormon's plan to acquire the celestial kingdom. The celestial kingdom is, for the Mormon, what they call “eternal life.”

Step One: Faith. The Mormon faith is different from biblical faith because it has a different Jesus. As described above, The Jesus of Mormonism is our spiritual brother

from heaven, who, like us, was born a spirit child of God. He is the first born child of the Heavenly Father. Bruce R. McConkie, a Mormon theologian, warned that people who speak of a “special relationship with [this] Christ” are guilty of “excessive zeal” and “pure sectarian nonsense.”³ Faith for the Mormon is never spoken of as directed towards the deity of Christ and His full atonement on the cross for the sins of the world. Rather faith is seen as a response to whatever Christ commands, not as a trust in His complete ability to save.⁴ This kind of faith never results in a personal relationship with Him.

Step Two: Repentance. The Bible makes clear that repentance for salvation is always from sin or sins and toward God. For the Mormon repentance involves confessing and abandoning sin as well as restoring or resolving all damage done by one’s sin. This definition sounds biblical. But the further condition is added that the repentant person must “spend the balance of your lives trying to live the commandments of the Lord so he can eventually pardon you and cleanse you.”⁵ Repentance is a work, and only a prelude to the process of acquiring salvation by obedience to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Little, if anything, is said of repentance leading to Jesus Christ. If that is the Mormon understanding of repentance, then it is clear why the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints goes on to add the steps listed below.

Step Three: Baptism by Immersion in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is here where the clear stamp of Mormonism is unmistakable. The Mormon church claims to be the only true church thus all other churches and their practices and forms of baptism are false. Baptism by immersion through a “duly commissioned servant or representative of the Savior” (a Melchizedek priesthood holder or a priest in the Aaronic priesthood) is required.⁶ Therefore this baptism must take place in the Mormon church and is “the gateway through which we enter the celestial kingdom.”⁷

Step Four: Laying on of Hands by a Member of the Melchizedek Priesthood in Order to Receive the Holy Ghost. The presence of the Holy Spirit is not promised for the Mormon as a result of faith and belief. It comes instead mechanically when a baptized Mormon is prayed for by a member of that priestly class in the church: “The authority to bestow the Holy Ghost belongs to the Melchizedek Priesthood . . . the elder . . . says ‘Receive the Holy Ghost,’

and ‘I confirm you a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.’”⁸

Step Five: Ordination as a Melchizedek Priest (for males only). When one receives the laying on of hands by a priest of this order then exaltation and salvation becomes possible in that one also becomes a priest in the same order: “This higher priesthood is designed to enable men to gain exaltation in the highest heaven in eternity . . . Perfection can be gained only in and through and because of their priesthood.”⁹ As well, Mormons believe the Holy Ghost will come to a person only when he is faithful and desires help from this church official.¹⁰

Step Six: Receiving the Temple Endowments. Upon ordination to the priesthood, the designated person is then led through a ceremony of anointing and other similar rites—none of which have biblical sanction. Women may also receive these rites. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints maintains, however, that “through them [the rituals] the recipients are endowed with power from on high. They receive an education relative to the Lord’s purposes and plans . . . and are taught the things that must be done by man in order to gain exaltation in the world to come.”¹¹ The approximately 50 temples of the Mormon Church serve as the only place where these rites can be carried out and are therefore viewed as sacred by Mormons themselves.¹²

Step Seven: Celestial Marriage. *Doctrine and Covenants*, part of Mormon canonized scripture, states that “celestial marriage is the gate to an exaltation in the highest heaven within the celestial world.”¹³ As a part of temple endowments these members of the Mormon church are married for “time and eternity” to their spouses in a Mormon temple. Such marriages are essential so that once worthy Mormons are resurrected and possibly progress to godhood they may have their spouse with them to produce and procreate children for their world and universe.

Step Eight: Observing the Word of Wisdom. Joseph Smith taught that the use of *strong drinks*—alcoholic beverages—or *hot drinks*—referring probably to coffee and tea, both containing caffeine—would demonstrate unworthiness for exaltation.¹⁴ The church also teaches, “For observing the word of wisdom the reward is life, not only prolonged mortal life, but life eternal.”¹⁵ As well, without obedience to the Word of Wisdom, entrance to Mormon temples will not be granted. Without that allowance, a Mormon would not be able to enter the celestial kingdom.

Step Nine: Sustain the Prophet. As each Prophet/President of the church is believed to be the sole revelator and representative of God to his church, it is required of every worthy Mormon to support or sustain him as a prophet, seer, and revelator. “To reject the word of the Lord [the message of the Prophet] is to reject the Lord himself,” and hence to be unworthy of the celestial kingdom.¹⁶

Step Ten: Tithing. “One tenth of the interest or increase of each member of the Church is payable as tithing funds of the Church each year.”¹⁷ And—“payment of an honest tithing is essential to the attainment of those great blessings which the Lord has in store for his faithful saints. Members of the church who fail or neglect to pay an honest tithing are thereby denying themselves of the receipt of these rich blessings.”¹⁸ *Doctrine and Covenants* is even more explicit saying, “For he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming.”¹⁹ In other words, tithing is a part of the plan of salvation to escape censor at the second-coming of Christ.

Step Eleven: Sacrament Meetings. A sacrament meeting is the weekly Sunday gathering of local Latter-day Saints when they meet to sing, testify, and share the sacrament of bread and water. To participate regularly in this occasion is essential for staying in the close fellowship of the church. It serves as the basis for renewing one’s covenant vows begun at baptism: “By partaking of the sacrament, worthy saints renew the covenant previously made by them in the water of baptism.”²⁰ By keeping the covenant in the observance of the sacraments, the Mormon believes that “we will always have the Lord’s spirit to be with us and that by following this pattern, believing on his name, we will gain a remission of our sins.”²¹

Step Twelve: Obedience. Obedience to the church, its teachings, and the prophet is essential for the Mormon to gain exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Obedience is the first law of heaven, the cornerstone upon which all righteousness and progression rest. Remember that perdition or hell is reserved for apostates—those who leave the Mormon church and resign their membership in it. There is no salvation apart from total obedience of all laws and ordinances of the church.²²

Outer darkness is reserved for apostate members of the Mormon church. There will be no salvation of forgiveness for these “sons of perdition” who “will suffer the wrath of

God and partake of the second death.”²³

Conclusion: The plan of salvation according to the “gospel” of Mormonism is not just a gospel of works—it is a gospel of obedience and obligation to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In *Gospel Principles*, an official publication of that church, a parable describing the Mormon plan of salvation is told. A debtor begs his creditor for mercy as his debts are large and long overdue. Just as the cruel creditor is about to cast the man in prison a friend intervenes and pays the debt. He then says to the debtor, “You will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible.”²⁴ The friend who intervened, not with a free gift, but with a loan to be repaid, is symbolic of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each devout Saint therefore is now working hard to pay off his or her debt to the church. The Mormon gospel (good news) is no gospel. It is not the gospel of freedom through Christ, it is a gospel of servitude and obligation to a religious organization.

In Matthew 18:21-35, however, Jesus told the story of a certain king who forgave his servants their debts to him. One of the servants turned afterwards and demanded payment from a fellow servant of a hundred *denarii* debt. Unable to pay, the second servant was thrown into prison. Jesus illustrated the point that we should forgive one another just as God has forgiven us, those who believe in Him, from all our transgressions against God’s law. This thought echos the teaching of the Lord’s prayer—“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12).

The biblical gospel of Jesus Christ is that no debts remain to be paid. Jesus Christ suffered for our sins sufficiently on the cross so that each one who believes in Him may be forgiven of all wrongs—past, present, and future. If you have yet to receive his gift of eternal life, you may do so by believing that God loves you in spite of your sin, that Jesus suffered and paid the cost of your sin, and that salvation is His free gift to you. As the Bible says “with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). If that is the need of your life, pray this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I believe that you died for all of my sin. I believe God raised you from the dead. Right now I turn from myself and my sins to you. Come into my heart. I give myself to you. Please become the Lord of my life. Thank you for saving me. Amen.

Notes

1. Herschel Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1987), 55.
2. See the Interfaith Witness pamphlet "A Closer Look at the Mormon Concept of God" (prod. no. 213-117F) for more information on the Mormon concept of God.
3. "Who Answers Prayers?" *Sunstone Review* (April 1982), 13.
4. See *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995), 117-121 for more information.
5. *Ibid.*, 126.
6. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Press, 1976), 137.
7. *Gospel Principles*, 131.
8. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 167.
9. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 167.
10. *Gospel Principles*, 139.
11. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 227.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1986), 132:34-40,61-62.
14. *Ibid.*, 89.
15. *Gospel Principles*, 195.
16. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 150.
17. *Ibid.*, 796.
18. *Ibid.*, 798.
19. *Doctrine and Covenants*, 64:23.
20. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 660.
21. *Gospel Principles*, 155.
22. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 539.
23. *Gospel Principles*, 77.
24. *Doctrines of the Gospel, Student Manual*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints, 1986), p. 91 and *Doctrine and Covenants* 76:31-48.

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