

Do Mormons Worship the God of the Bible?

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In its short 180-year life, the Mormon Church has had a curious relationship with traditional Christianity. A quick look through Mormon history will demonstrate that the LDS Church has a long history of degrading Christian teachings. As a result, it is somewhat odd to find modern day LDS leaders referring to their church as a Christian denomination, for their desire to be denominated among groups they believe to be in utter error seems illogical.

Mormonism is founded upon the belief that it is not simply a Christian denomination, but is, rather, the restoration of true Christianity. This belief is based upon the claim by the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him and called him as a prophet. Smith relates that in the course of their visit, Christ and the Father had some rather terse words regarding traditional Christianity:

I was answered that I must join none of [the Christian churches], for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” [emphasis mine].

The belief that God holds the Christian creeds to be an abomination and all the Christian professors to be corrupt has led to some rather interesting statements by Mormon leaders. On July 26, 1857, second Prophet and President of the Mormon Church, Brigham Young, said that the Christian world is “like the captain and crew of a vessel on the ocean without a compass, and tossed to and fro whithersoever the wind listed to blow them. When the light came to [him], [he] saw that all the so-called Christian world was groveling in darkness.” On September 13, later the same year, Young said, “Ask them where heaven

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is? – where they are going to when they die? – where Paradise is? – and there is not a priest in the world that can answer your questions. Ask them what kind of a being our Heavenly Father is, and they cannot tell you so much as Balaam’s ass told him. They are more ignorant than children.” On September 16, 1860, he said, “The Christian world, so called, are heathens as to their knowledge of the salvation of God.”

Third Prophet of the LDS Church, John Taylor, also had some rather crude remarks regarding traditional Christianity. On January 17, 1858, he called Christianity “a perfect pack of nonsense.” On November 1, later the same year, he said, “Are Christians ignorant? Yes, as ignorant of the things of God as the brute beast.” In addition, he shared what is perhaps his most stinging comment on May 6, 1870, when he said, “What does the Christian world know about God? Nothing; yet these very men assume the right and power to tell others what they shall and what they shall not believe in. Why, so far as the things of God are concerned, they are the veriest [sic] fools; they know neither God nor the things of God.”

While the LDS Church appears to have toned down its rhetoric in recent years, the basic belief that it is the one and only true church on earth and that traditional Christianity was and is apostate remains unchanged. LDS Apostle James E. Talmage said in his 1965 book *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, that after the ministry of Jesus Christ “the Church was literally driven from the earth,” and that it remained in this state until the “restoration was effected by the Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith.” In a 1972 *Ensign* article, LDS Apostle LeGrand Richards said, “At the time that Joseph Smith had his marvelous vision, there wasn’t a church in the world worshipping the God who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and the fountains of waters, and created man in his own image.”

As these comments demonstrate, the LDS Church continues to hold the longstanding belief that traditional Christianity is in utter error and that the Mormon Church is the only true church on the earth today. In addition, the comments demonstrate that even the leaders of the LDS Church realize the utter gulf that exists between the teachings of traditional Christianity and the teachings of the LDS Church. Because of these stark differences, traditional Christian teachings and LDS teachings cannot both be true, for if Mormons are correct about the nature of God, then Christians are in complete error. However, if Christians are correct about the nature of God, Mormons are in complete error. Consequently, the question left for discussion is exactly which teachings are correct. Are the teachings of the LDS Church correct? Are they in alignment with the Bible? I will explore these questions to follow by highlighting three specific areas where the God of Mormonism differs from the God of the Bible.

The nature of the Mormon Godhead bears some similarity to the Arian heresy of the early Christian church. Arius taught that God the Father and Jesus Christ are two separate

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beings distinct in nature, with Christ being a subordinate God. In similar respects, Mormonism teaches that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are literally three separate beings with three distinct natures. James E. Talmage explained the nature of the Mormon Godhead in *A Study of the Articles of Faith* when he said, “Three personages composing the great presiding council of the universe have revealed themselves to man: (1) God the Eternal Father; (2) His Son, Jesus Christ; and (3) the Holy Ghost. That these three are separate individuals, physically distinct from each other, is demonstrated by the accepted records of divine dealings with man.”

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The belief that the three persons of the Godhead have separate and distinct natures originated with Joseph Smith’s First Vision claim. According to his writings in *The Pearl of Great Price*, Smith was visited by God the Father and Jesus Christ in the spring of 1820 in answer to a prayer regarding which church to join. Smith said:

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other – This is My Beloved Son, Hear Him!

Mormons believe that these two beings were God the Father and Jesus Christ. As a result, they believe that Christ and the Father are separate beings and that the traditional Christian teaching on the nature of God, i.e., one God in nature who eternally exists in three persons, is a false, late development of Christianity that is foreign to the Bible.

Further derived from the First Vision is the belief that God the Father and Jesus Christ have bodies of flesh and bone just as man. In 2007, former Prophet of the LDS Church, Gordon B. Hinckley, said, “And so in 1820, in that incomparable vision, the Father and the Son appeared to the boy Joseph. They spoke to him with words that were audible, and he spoke to Them. . . . They were beings tabernacled in flesh. And out of that experience has come our unique and true understanding of the nature of Deity.” This belief is detailed out in the Mormon scripture titled *The Doctrine and Covenants*, where it says, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also.” Talmage said, “Therefore we know that both the Father and the Son are in form and stature perfect men; each of them possesses a tangible body, infinitely pure and perfect and attended by transcendent glory, nevertheless a body of flesh and bones.”

The belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate beings creates numerous problems for the LDS claim to be following the God of the Bible, for it is in utter conflict with the Bible on numerous counts. Deut. 6:4 says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God,

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the Lord is one.” This verse is known as the Shema and is the basic confession of the Jewish faith. With this statement, Israel acknowledged the unity of God and placed their belief in stark contrast with that of their polytheistic Near East neighbors. There is little doubt that the Jewish belief in the unity and oneness of God, which the Shema clearly communicates, is utterly incompatible with the tri-theistic nature of the Mormon Godhead.

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There are a multitude of other scriptures that can be cited to demonstrate that the Mormon idea of three separate Gods existing in the Godhead is completely foreign to the nature of God as taught in the Bible; however, space will only permit me to mention a few. Isa. 44:8 says, “Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.” Deut. 4:35 says, “To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.” As if stating this once was not strong enough, in Mark 12, a Scribe cited Deut. 4:35 when commenting on one of Christ’s answers to the Pharisees where Jesus referenced Deut. 6:4. Jesus’ citation of the Shema as part of the greatest commandment underscores its importance and is further declaration of God’s unity. In addition, the Scribe’s acknowledgement that Christ’s answer was good, and his use of Deut. 4:35 to support this fact further emphasizes the biblical declaration of the unity of God, a fact that is completely devastating to the Mormon belief in a tri-theistic Godhead.

As discussed earlier, the Mormon Church teaches that God the Father has a body of flesh and bone. Unfortunately for Mormons, there are biblical problems with this teaching. John 4:24 says, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” This verse has long been held as a declaration regarding God’s nature as spirit. The Bible Knowledge Commentary has this to say regarding this verse: “God is Spirit is a better translation than the KJV’s ‘God is a Spirit.’ . . . This is a declaration of His invisible nature. He is not confined to one location.” In addition, Col. 1:15 teaches that Christ “is the image of the invisible [emphasis mine] God,” and 1 Tim. 1:17 says, “To the King of ages, immortal, invisible [emphasis mine], the only God.”

The understanding that God is invisible and spirit lines up perfectly in a metaphysical sense with the biblical declaration that God is omnipresent. For, if God were embodied in flesh and bone, He would be metaphysically incapable of being in more than one place at a time. However, scripture testifies repeatedly of the fact that God is everywhere present. Ps. 139:7-8 makes it very clear that no matter where we go, God is always there: “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!” In addition, 1 Kings 8:27 testifies that there is nothing that can contain God, for He is everywhere: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!” Furthermore, in Jer. 23:23-24, God

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Himself testifies of His omnipresent nature, making it one of the clearest passages of scripture to testify of God being everywhere: “Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.”

These passages leave Mormons in a quandary, for the nature of their God is wholly incompatible with the above descriptions. In contrast, the Mormon God is not simply spirit, rather he is a spirit that is contained in and embodied in flesh. As a result, the Mormon God is limited, e.g., He is limited by his body to a here rather than a there. In addition, the very nature of having a body means that He is contained by that body and cannot fill heaven and earth. Instead, He can fill only His flesh and bone.

It appears that James E. Talmage recognized these problems and simply chose to admit that the God of Mormonism cannot be everywhere. He said, “It has been said, therefore, that God is everywhere present; but this does not mean that the actual person of any one member of the Godhead can be physically present in more than one place at a time. . . . His person cannot be in more than one place at any one time. Unfortunately for Talmage and all other Mormons, the writers of the books of the Bible, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have clearly testified to the contrary. As a result, the nature of the Mormon God does not simply contradict a late developed teaching of an apostate Christianity; rather it contradicts the Bible itself.

Historically there have been a variety of Mormon views regarding the nature of God the Father. The purpose of this post is not to address every single strain of LDS thought that exists in this area, nor do I contend that all Mormons hold the beliefs to which I will speak. Instead, I will address some of the traditional, longstanding LDS beliefs regarding the nature of the Father. These beliefs are spoken to in canonized LDS scripture, transcend Mormon thought, and affect LDS beliefs in other areas.

As discussed in the previous posts, Joseph Smith claimed that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him in the spring of 1820, and, as a result, the members of the LDS Church believe God the Father and Jesus Christ to be separate and distinct beings embodied in flesh and bone. However, Mormon teachings did not stop developing at this point. On April 6, 1844, Smith delivered one of his last public speeches, known today as The King Follett Discourse. During this discourse, he shared one of Mormonism’s most controversial doctrines, namely, that God Himself is an exalted man: “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens. That is the great secret.”

The current version of the LDS Temple Endowment Ceremony furthers this doctrine by teaching that God the Father gained his knowledge through a process similar to the one

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through which Adam, Eve, and the rest of mankind progress. In a re-creation of a scene in the Garden of Eden, the ceremony shows Satan, speaking to Eve, saying, “I want you to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, that your eyes may be opened, for that is the way Father gained his knowledge[emphasis mine].” Former Brigham Young University Professor of Philosophy, David Paulsen, spoke to this doctrine in his 1975 Doctoral Thesis titled *Comparative Coherency of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical (Absolutistic) Theism*: “At some distant point in an infinite past, He earned the right to be ‘God’ through a process which men, as his children, are now repeating.”

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The Mormon doctrine that God was once a man has led many LDS to the position that God is merely a title a being holds. Again, Paulsen addressed this fact in his Thesis, saying, “The being who is God has not always been God – i.e., he has not always qualified for the honorific title ‘God’ – a distinction he earned through a process of growth and development toward Godliness.” Naturally, the fact that God the Father has not always been God leads to some logical questions. Who was God before God the Father? From where did God the Father come? Smith provided an answer to these questions by teaching that God the Father had a father, much the same as all human beings: “Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son?”

Mormonism furthers this by teaching that God and man are the same species. Past Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie said, “Man and God are of the same race.” In *How Wide the Divide*, Mormon Scholar David Robinson states that Mormons “believe that God and humans are the same species of being and that all men and women were his spiritual offspring in a premortal existence.” In addition, The LDS Church teaches that man, through a process known as Eternal Progression, can progress to become a God. Smith said, “You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, – namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one, – from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation.”

This teaching is also referenced in The Doctrine and Covenants where it says, “Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.”

From a biblical perspective, there are several issues with the Mormon view of God the Father as described in the previous post. First, contrary to Mormon teachings, the Bible says very clearly that God is not, nor has He ever been, a man. Num. 23:19 says, “God is not man [emphasis mine], that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his

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mind." First Sam. 15:29 says, "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man [emphasis mine], that he should have regret."

In addition, the Bible repeatedly says that there are no Gods other than God the Father. As a result, the Mormon teachings that God the Father has a father who was God prior to Him and that man can progress to become a God himself contradict the Bible. Isa. 43:10 says, "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me." Isa. 44:6 says, "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.'" The Lord continues this point in verse 8 of the same chapter where He further declares, "Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."

Second, the Mormon understanding of the word God as an honorific title is completely incompatible with biblical teachings. As the previously cited verses demonstrate, scripture is very emphatic that there are no other Gods besides God the Father, and, as a consequence, He has always been God. As a result, it is impossible for Him to have earned the title God, because God is something that He has always been; it is something He simply is.

Third, contrary to Mormon teachings, the Bible says that God and man are separate and distinct in nature and, as a result, are not the same species. Since God has always existed as God, He is uncreated and self-existent in nature. In contrast, humans are contingent in being, i.e., they are dependent upon God for their very existence. God is the only being in existence that is not contingent upon anything else for his existence. In Exod. 3:14, God gives us a small glimpse into this fact about His nature: "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you".'" Speaking of this verse, Bible Commentator James E. Smith says, "The statement 'I am who I am' can be rendered a number of different ways in English. The statement basically emphasizes the timelessness of God. He is the self-existing one, the Eternal, the one without beginning or end." In addition, The Apologetics Study Bible says, "Exod. 3:14 actually teaches a distinction between God and humans. God alone is the eternal, self-existing one. Humans are created beings." Consequently, the Mormon idea that God and man, the uncreated and the created, the self-existent and the contingent, are the same species is completely illogical and foreign to the Bible.

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