

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Comprehending the Counterfeit: Understanding, Counteracting, and Evangelizing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was founded and organized on April 6, 1830, by Joseph Smith.² Today there are millions of Mormons across the globe, and the LDS church is experiencing rapid growth. Mormon missionaries, presenting what they believe to be the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, are showing up on the doorsteps of houses in every neighborhood. Although the Mormons claim to be Christian, although Mormons use Christian terms when talking about their faith, and although Mormons adhere to high Christian morals, the LDS church challenges three of the most fundamental doctrines of biblical Christianity: the doctrines of God, man, and salvation. The LDS doctrines of God, man, and salvation and the biblical doctrines of God, man, and salvation are mutually exclusive. Southern Baptists and other evangelical congregations must become aware of the distinctions between biblical Christian doctrine and LDS doctrine. Since Mormons use Christian terminology and promote Christian values, many Southern Baptists and evangelicals are not able to spot the distinctions between what the LDS church teaches and what the Bible teaches. Because many pastors and teachers are unaware of LDS doctrines, many evangelical church members are unable to distinguish properly between LDS doctrines and biblical doctrines. Hence, many Bible-believing Christians are susceptible to doctrines antithetical to the Bible.

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² Hereafter, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints will be referred to as either the Mormon church or the LDS church. Also, Mormons and LDS will be used interchangeably when referring to the adherents of the LDS church.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

This essay will attempt to present a succinct and fair overview of the LDS doctrines of God, man, and salvation along with a biblical strategy for practicing evangelism to Mormons. Furthermore, the LDS doctrine of God is the doctrinal backbone of the LDS religious belief system. If Mormon claims about God are not true, then Mormon claims about man and salvation are not true. By understanding the LDS concept of God, one can attempt to deconstruct the entire Mormon worldview. Southern Baptists and evangelical pastors and teachers should be ready to understand and to undermine with genuine love any doctrine that is contrary to what the Bible alone teaches.

The LDS Doctrine of God

The LDS church doctrine of God teaches that there is a plurality of gods. The concept of the LDS doctrine of God is contingent upon the first vision of Joseph Smith. In the year 1820, a revival broke out in the area where Joseph Smith lived. At this time, Joseph Smith claimed to have become concerned about what church he should join. After reading Scripture from the Epistle of James, Smith claimed that he journeyed into the woods to ask God which church was the true church. While in the woods praying, Smith claimed to have had his first vision. Later in life, Joseph Smith recorded the vision: “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 my name and said, pointing to the other, *This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him?*³

Smith claimed that the two separate beings that appeared to him in the woods were the Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Smith claimed that the two separate beings were two separate gods. Smith’s alleged vision led him to teach that there were pluralities of gods in the universe.

On June 16, 1844, a week before his death, Smith preached a sermon on the plurality of gods that contended that even the New Testament taught that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost were distinct gods:

I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have selected this text for that purpose. I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of Deity, it has been on the plurality of Gods. It has been preached by the elders for fifteen years.

I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct

³ Joseph Smith—History 1:17–19, *Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981), 49.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

personage and a Spirit; and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold! We have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural; and who can contradict it.⁴

The LDS doctrine of God is derived from the visions and teachings of Joseph Smith. The LDS church contends that there are a plurality of gods in the universe. However, the LDS church claims that all worship and all lordship should be given to the godhead of this world. The LDS godhead is comprised of the Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. The Mormon church teaches that there are three distinct gods unified in mind and purpose that comprise the godhead of earth. In order to understand the LDS godhead, one must understand each person of the godhead as well as the purpose that unifies the godhead.

3

The Heavenly Father

The Mormon Heavenly Father has a body of flesh and bone, and therefore, is a corporeal being. The LDS identify God the Father with the titles Heavenly Father or Elohim.⁵ One of the most distinctive teachings within LDS doctrine is that the Heavenly Father is the literal father of all earth-born humans. In his work on the Christology of the LDS church, Cky Carrigan explains the nature of the Mormon Heavenly Father:

Mormons posit a Heavenly Father who has a body consisting of all the parts usually associated with the male gender. The Father is the supervisory organizer of the matter of this universe of many worlds, but he did not create everything *ex nihilo*. Although some Mormons describe Elohim as eternal, infinite, omnipotent and omniscient, these terms are often used in relative comparison with mankind and not in an absolute sense. Elohim's power is great but necessarily limited. His knowledge is great, but necessarily growing. Since he has a body, he necessarily is localized in space. He has changed from a man to a God to a greater God. Elohim is a contingent God. Another greater being caused his transformation from one of many eternal intelligences to an offspring of a god. And finally, while Elohim is the chief God of this universe, he is only one of many chief Gods among many universes.⁶

⁴ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1977), 370.

⁵ *Elohim* is the plural name for God in the Hebrew language.

⁶ Cky J. Carrigan, "An Assessment and Critique of the Distinctive Christology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), 17–18.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The LDS teach that the Heavenly Father was once a man and had a literal father. However, the Heavenly Father became an exalted man, had spirit children, and made a plan for all of his spirit children to return to him and to be like him. The Mormon Heavenly Father is now the God of this world.

According to LDS authorities, all doctrine concerning the nature of the Heavenly Father is gleaned from individual experience and from Joseph Smith's visions and revelations.⁷ Joseph Smith contended, "The Father has a body of flesh and bone 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."⁸ According to Smith, the Heavenly Father was once a mortal man:

God himself [the Heavenly Father] was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. 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—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.⁹

Thus, the Heavenly Father has a body of flesh and bone, is an exalted man, and exists now in the likeness of a man. The LDS doctrine of the nature of the Heavenly Father lays the foundation for the LDS doctrine that teaches that the Heavenly Father is the literal father of all earth-born children. Since the Heavenly Father has a body like a man, he is able to have children and to function just as a mortal man would, but on a different level.

The LDS church contends that every earth-born human was first the offspring of the Heavenly Father in a pre-mortal realm. Mormons call the premortal realm "the first estate." According to the Mormon church, everyone was born of Heavenly Parents and lived in heavenly mansions in the first estate before being born on earth through the procreation of earthly parents. Explaining the relationship of the Heavenly Father to his children, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* says:

⁷ See *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. by Daniel H. Ludlow, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 546. Since all truth claims about God are based on subjective experience, LDS are left with subjective arguments to defend their doctrine of God. Hence, in the LDS worldview, subjective experience is elevated to a higher level than objective evidence.

⁸ Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981), 130: 22.

⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings*, 345.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Father, Elohim, is called the Father because he is the literal father of the spirits of mortals (Heb. 12:9). This paternity is not allegorical. All individual human spirits were begotten (not created from nothing or made) by the Father in a pre-mortal state, where they lived and were nurtured by Heavenly Parents. These spirit children of the Father came to earth to receive mortal bodies; there is a literal family relationship among human-kind.¹⁰

5

It must be remembered that the LDS are not claiming that the Heavenly Father is a regular man. He is more than a man. The LDS contend that the Heavenly Father is an exalted man who has become a god. He was once as all men on earth are now. However, the Heavenly Father has progressed, become exalted, and reached a state of godhood. He is now the god of this world and is rearing spirit children so that they may progress, become exalted, and be like him in every way. He has billions of literal sons. According to Mormon doctrine, the Heavenly Father and two of his literal sons, Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost, comprise the LDS godhead.

Jesus Christ

Mormons identify Jesus with the title Jehovah.¹¹ LDS doctrine teaches that Jesus Christ was the first-born son of Elohim in the first estate and is the elder brother of all the Heavenly Father's spirit children. Furthermore, the LDS contend that Jesus Christ in the most literal sense is the only begotten son of the Heavenly Father in the second estate.¹² Carrigan elaborates on the nature of the relationship between the Mormon Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ:

The LDS church teaches that Jesus was the firstborn spiritual offspring of the Heavenly Father in the pre-mortal realm, or first estate. The Heavenly Father was also the literal parent of billions of others in the pre-mortal realm... Jesus was also the only begotten physical offspring of the Heavenly Father in the mortal realm, or the second estate. The Heavenly Father, endowed with a physical body of flesh and bone, sired Jesus Christ.¹³

The second estate is known as the mortal realm and is the current existence of all earth-born humans. In the first estate, Jesus Christ was the product of procreation between the Heavenly Father and the heavenly Mother. In the second estate, Jesus Christ was the

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 546.

¹¹ YHWH, like *Elohim*, is a Hebrew name for God. YHWH and *Elohim* are used interchangeably to refer to the same one God of Israel. See Deut. 6:4.

¹² For a discussion on what evangelicals mean when they say "firstborn" or "only begotten" see Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House 1999), 113–14.

¹³ Carrigan, "An Assessment and Critique," 20.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

product of procreation between the Heavenly Father and Mary. Therefore, Jesus Christ, according to Mormon theology, is the twice-sired Son of the Heavenly Father. The Mormon Jesus is the only spirit child of the Heavenly Father that has been twice sired.

In the second estate, Jesus *became* the only begotten of the Heavenly Father. In the most literal sense, Jesus was the product of procreation between the Heavenly Father and Mary. In his book *Mormon Doctrine*, Mormon theologian Bruce R. McConkie expounded on the nature of the conception of the Son of God in the second estate:

God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy Man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about his paternity; he was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural course of events, for he is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says.¹⁴

Since Jesus was the only begotten of the Father in the second estate, he was, therefore, born of a mortal (Mary) and an immortal (Heavenly Father). The LDS contend that since Jesus was born of both an immortal man and a mortal woman, he inherited both mortality and immortality. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states, "From Mary, a mortal woman, Jesus inherited mortality, including the capacity to die. From his exalted Father, he inherited immortality, the capacity to live forever."¹⁵ Jesus was the only son of the Heavenly Father to have been twice-sired and to inherit *through procreation* immortality and the capacity to live forever. Because Jesus had the capacity to live forever, the LDS contend that he had the power to make atonement for the Heavenly Father's spirit children. Moreover, because Jesus had the power to make atonement, he would make it possible for all mortal spirit children to be resurrected. The specific details on the nature of the atonement of the Son of God will be dealt with later in this essay.

The Holy Ghost

In Mormon doctrine, less is known about the nature of the Holy Ghost than the nature of the Son of God. According to their theologians, the Holy Ghost is a spirit man. The LDS church contends that the Holy Ghost is the testifier and revealer of all truth about the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost is a distinct entity from the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost, unlike the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ,

¹⁴ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), 742.

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 725.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

does not have a body of flesh and bones.¹⁶ However, the Holy Ghost is still considered a personage in the Mormon godhead. The origin of the Holy Ghost is not clearly explained by the LDS church. However, the testifying work of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of the Holy Ghost in the second estate are fundamental to LDS theology.

Some LDS contend that the origin of the Holy Ghost is from the Heavenly Father. Consider what the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* says about the origin of the Holy Ghost:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that the Holy Ghost is a spirit man, a spirit son of God the Father. It is fundamental church doctrine that God is the Father of the spirits of all men and women, that Jesus Christ is literally God's son both in the spirit and in the flesh, and that the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit separate and distinct from both the Father and the Son.¹⁷

Although the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* clearly states that the Holy Ghost is a spirit son of the Heavenly Father, other LDS sources contend that the exact origin of the Holy Ghost cannot be known. Concerning the Holy Ghost, McConkie says that in this time period, "Nothing has been revealed as to his origin or destiny; expressions on these matters are both speculative and fruitless."¹⁸ Whether the origin of the Holy Ghost is from the Heavenly Father or not, the Mormon church still maintains that the Holy Ghost is a real being. What must be remembered about the Holy Ghost is that he is a spirit man with a spirit body. If the Holy Ghost is indeed a spirit son of the Heavenly Father, then he, like Jesus, is a brother to all of the Heavenly Father's spirit children. What is most stressed by the LDS is not the origin of the Holy Ghost, but the works of the Holy Ghost in the second estate.

The testifying work of the Holy Ghost in the second estate is what brings all men to the knowledge of the LDS gospel. The LDS contend that without the convicting work of the Holy Ghost, one would never know whether the LDS gospel is true. However, because of the work of the Holy Ghost in the second estate, one can know that the Heavenly Father is the father of one's spirit and that in order to return to him one must obey the LDS gospel. In a LDS missionary manual, *Gospel Principles*, the importance of the Holy Ghost in the gospel plan is explained: "The Holy Ghost will witness to us that Jesus is our savior and redeemer. ... He will reveal to us that our Heavenly Father is, without doubt, the father of our spirits. He will help us to understand that we can become exalted like our

¹⁶ The Holy Ghost in LDS doctrine is believed to have a spirit body. However, the LDS do not think of spirit in the traditional sense of the word. They believe that spirit is composed of extremely fine matter that cannot be perceived with the naked eye.

¹⁷ Ibid., 649.

¹⁸ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 359.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Heavenly Father.”¹⁹ The testifying work of the Holy Ghost in the second estate is believed to draw one to the truth about the LDS religion.

Mormons contend that the gift of the Holy Ghost is a distinct work from the testifying work of the Holy Ghost. Whereas the Holy Ghost can testify to one who is not a Mormon, the gift of the Holy Ghost is received only by one who has been baptized and confirmed a member of the LDS church. In *Gospel Principles*, the LDS explain the difference between being led by the testifying work of the Holy Ghost and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost:

The gift of the Holy Ghost is the privilege given to a baptized person, after he has been confirmed a member of the Church, to receive guidance and inspiration from the Holy Ghost. Of course, the members of the Church must be worthy to receive revelation and enjoy companionship of the Holy Ghost.... A person may be temporarily guided by the Holy Ghost without receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. But this guidance will not continue with him if he does not receive baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.²⁰

Often the LDS will give a free *Book of Mormon (BOM)* to non-Mormons. The LDS will ask the non-Mormons to read the *BOM* and to ask God if what it says is true. The LDS will ask the non-Mormon to read *Moroni 10:4–5*, which reads,

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.²¹

Based on *Moroni 10:4–5*, the LDS claim that the Holy Ghost will testify to the non-Mormon that the *BOM* is true. However, the LDS do not consider the testimony of the Holy Ghost to be the gift of the Holy Ghost. In *Gospel Principles*, when the LDS make a distinction between the testifying work of the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost, they are referring to the difference between the testimony of the Holy Ghost which anyone can receive, and the gift of the Holy Ghost which only a member of the LDS church can receive. Therefore, there are two distinct roles of the Holy Ghost in the second estate.

¹⁹ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1992), 34.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

²¹ Joseph Smith, Jr., *Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981), 529.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Purpose of the Godhead Restated

Thus far, it has been established that the Mormon godhead is comprised of three distinct gods. The LDS contend that the Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three distinct gods unified in one purpose. Joseph Smith once taught that the godhead was united by an everlasting covenant before the earth was formed.²² The nature of the covenant among the three gods is not clear. In the conclusion of his work on LDS Christology, Carrigan comments on the nature of the LDS godhead:

The Father (Elohim), the Son (Jehovah) and the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) are three physically separate and distinct Gods. Each is also a distinct substance. The three Gods of the Godhead are not essentially one. They are not ontologically one. The three Gods of the Godhead are one, however, to the extent that they share a common purpose and body of attributes.²³

LDS theology seems to indicate that the purpose of the godhead is to ensure the progression and exaltation of earth-born humans. With his own special work, each person of the godhead ensures the exaltation and progression of earth-born humans. First, the Heavenly Father procreates, thereby bringing spirit children into the first estate. Second, after the fall, when earth-born humans became mortal, Jesus Christ made atonement so that one could be resurrected as an immortal after death, thereby making it possible for one to return to the Heavenly Father. Third, the Holy Ghost testifies that the LDS gospel is true, thereby making one aware of the truths of the LDS gospel. Thus, the three distinct gods of the LDS godhead are unified in one purpose, with each god having a distinct role in accomplishing the overall purpose.

The LDS Doctrine of Man

The LDS doctrine of man is fundamentally distinct from the biblical doctrine of man. The study of the doctrine of man is called anthropology. The eternity and progress of man and the fall of man are two of the most distinctive precepts that the LDS attempt to explain by their doctrine of man. The LDS doctrine of man is essentially a logical inference from the LDS doctrine of God. Mormon doctrine teaches that humans are the same species as the Heavenly Father. If earth-born humans are not the literal spirit children of the Heavenly Father, and if humans are not baby gods, then the Mormon gospel is not the true gospel. In LDS theology, the doctrine of man is, therefore, contingent upon the doctrine of God.

²² See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings*, 190.

²³ Carrigan, "An Assessment and Critique," 262.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Eternity and Progress of Man

The LDS church teaches that man is eternal. Though man is eternal, the existence of man can be explained in three phases.²⁴ First, man existed in eternity as an eternal intelligence.²⁵ Second, eternal intelligence was born as pre-mortal spirit children to the Heavenly Father and Mother in the first estate. Third, in the second estate, spirit children continue to be born as physical children to earthly parents. Foundational to understanding the nature of the LDS doctrine of the eternity and progress of man, is an understanding of man's existence as an eternal intelligence, of man's premortal existence in the first estate, and of man's mortal existence in the second estate.

The doctrine of the eternity of man is based on the teachings and revelations of Joseph Smith as he wrote on May 6, 1833: "Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be."²⁶ Joseph Smith believed that man is an eternal intelligence that was not created or made, and existed in the beginning with the intelligence of the Heavenly Father.

Basing their doctrines on the revelations of Smith, the LDS church also contends that man existed co-eternally with the Heavenly Father as an eternal intelligence. In the *Pearl of Great Price (PGP)*, *The Book of Abraham (BOA)* says, "Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble great ones."²⁷ Moreover, "Portions of the self-existent spirit element are born as spirit children, or in other words the intelligence which cannot be created or made, because it is self-existent, is organized into intelligences."²⁸ According to LDS doctrine, the eternal intelligence existed eternally as spirit element. However, through procreation, the eternal intelligence or eternal spirit matter was organized and became newborn spirit humans.

Mormon authorities do not explain every detail about the nature of the change of eternal intelligence into spirit children. Some LDS theologians contend that the first time that man received a conscious identity was in the first estate after procreation.²⁹ Whatever the

²⁴ Carrigan notes that man exists in more than three states of existence. However, in this study only three will be mentioned. See Carrigan, "An Assessment and Critique," 103.

²⁵ The traditional concept of eternity is rejected by the LDS. They believe that eternal intelligence has always existed in time. Traditionally, eternity has meant timelessness. Time does not exist where there is no space, matter, and motion. Since Mormons contend that matter is eternal, eternity cannot be dened as timelessness.

²⁶ Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 93:29.

²⁷ Smith, *Pearl of Great Price*, 35–38.

²⁸ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 387.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

nature of eternal intelligence before the first estate, it remains clear that at some point before the world was organized, the eternal intelligence became the spirit sons and daughters of heavenly parents. Mormon doctrine is more elaborate about the nature of pre-mortal humans in the first estate, than about the pre-existence of pre-mortal humans as eternal intelligence.

The existence of pre-mortal humans in the first estate as spirit children of the Heavenly Father is the second phase of the eternality and progress of man. Two principal events in the first estate lay the foundation for the LDS understanding of anthropology. The first principal event was the birth of humans as spirit children. As mentioned under the doctrine of the godhead, the Heavenly Father is the literal father of pre-mortal spirit children in the first estate; thus, man was not made or created. Heavenly Parents procreated pre-mortal humans. Thus, man is the same species as the Heavenly Father. The second principal event was the Grand Council held in heaven while all pre-mortal spirit children were still in the first estate. In chapter 2 of *Gospel Principles*, the purpose of the **Grand Council is explained:**

Since we could not progress further in Heaven, our Heavenly Father called a Grand Council to present us his plan for our progression. We learned that if we followed his plan, we would become like him. We would have a resurrected body; we would have all power in heaven and on earth; we would become heavenly parents and have spirit children just as he does.³⁰

At the Grand Council, the plan of salvation was presented to the Heavenly Father's spirit children. Part of the plan of salvation was that the spirit children must leave the first estate and the presence of the Heavenly Father. After the Grand Council, the earth was organized for the Heavenly Father's spirit children.³¹ Whereas the spirit children were pre-mortal in the first estate, in the second estate the spirit children became mortal.

The mortal existence of the spirit children in the second estate entailed leaving the presence of the Heavenly Father and receiving a body of flesh and bones. Adam and Eve were the first spirit children to come to earth. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden and remained in the garden until they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they became mortal and obtained the ability to have children. Chapter 6 of *Gospel Principles* explains the effects of the fall of Adam and Eve:

³⁰ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, *Gospel Principles*, 11.

³¹ The earth, according to LDS, was not created *ex nihilo*. The earth was organized and formed out of pre-existing spirit-matter that had an eternal existence.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Because Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Lord sent them out of the Garden of Eden into the world as we know it. Their physical condition changed as a result of their eating the forbidden fruit. As God had promised, they became mortal. They were able to have children. They and their children could experience sickness, pain, and physical death.³²

Not only did the fall of Adam and Eve cause them to become mortal and give them the ability to have children, but it also caused them to be separated from the direct physical presence of the Heavenly Father. However, according to Mormon doctrine, the fall and its consequences were part of the Heavenly Father's plan of salvation for his spirit children. Discussed at the Grand Council in heaven, the plan of salvation entailed coming to earth, obtaining mortality, and gaining the ability to procreate. Since the fall was part of the heavenly plan, the LDS church rejects the traditional doctrine of the fall of man.

The Fall of Man

Mormon theology contends that the fall of man was a fall toward, and not away from, perfection. As discussed previously, the Heavenly Father presented a plan of progression to his children at the Grand Council in the first estate. The Heavenly Father's plan was that his spirit children would come to earth, be separated from him, become mortal, and obtain the ability to have children so that man could progress toward godhood.

Thus, there are several crucial points wherein the Mormon church strays from biblical Christianity concerning the fall. First, LDS do not believe that the procreation of children in the second estate was possible without the fall. Second, since the fall was part of the Heavenly Father's plan, it was toward and not away from perfection. Third, since the fall was toward perfection, the LDS do not adhere to the biblical doctrine of original sin. The fall, according to Mormon doctrine, was more of a benefit for earth-born humans than a handicap.

The Heavenly Father's plan was for earth-born humans to be like him in every way. According to Mormon scriptures, the Heavenly Father gave two commands to Adam and Eve while they were in the Garden of Eden. First, according to *Moses 2:18*, the Heavenly Father said, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."³³

The LDS contend that Adam and Eve could not have children as long as they were in a pre-mortal state. Thus, before they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and became mortal, Adam and Eve were unable to fulfill the first command of the Heavenly

³² Ibid., 31.

³³ Smith, *Pearl of Great Price*, 6.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Father. Second, according to *Moses 3:17*, the Heavenly Father said, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."³⁴

In order for Adam to follow the Heavenly Father's plan of progression, he had to be obedient to the commands of his Father. In order to obey the first command of the Heavenly Father to bear children, Adam and Eve had to obtain a mortal body. The only way to obtain a mortal body was to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To obey the first command to have children, Adam and Eve had to transgress the second command and eat from the tree.

The LDS find no problem with these conflicting commands of the Heavenly Father. The LDS contend that Adam made the best choice given his current situation, and therefore, transgressed the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Furthermore, the LDS church contends that Adam and Eve committed no serious sin by transgressing the command not to eat of the tree. *Gospel Principles* explains:

Some people believe that Adam and Eve committed a serious sin when they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, latter-day scriptures help us understand that their fall was a necessary step in the plan of life and a great blessing to all mankind. Because of the fall, we are blessed with physical bodies, the right to choose between good and evil, and the opportunity to gain eternal life. None of these privileges would have been ours had Adam and Eve remained in the garden.³⁵

It was part of the Heavenly Father's plan for earth-born humans to have a physical body, to have the ability to choose between good and evil, and to have the opportunity to gain eternal life. Without a physical mortal body, mankind could not have children; thus, if the Heavenly Father's plan was to be carried out, then the transgression of Adam and Eve was necessary. The LDS simply overlook the problems that result from the conflicting commands given by the Heavenly Father.

Tad Callister, a Mormon author and a member of the LDS church, said about the fall of Adam and Eve: "The Fall was not a tragic step backward; to the contrary, it was a painful but nonetheless giant step forward in our eternal journey. It was the springboard of our ascent."³⁶ If Adam and Eve had remained in the Garden of Eden, then they would have

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵ *Gospel Principles*, 31.

³⁶ Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 2000), 41.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

never had the chance to progress toward eternal life. If they had not eaten from the tree, Adam and Eve would have remained in the Garden of Eden forever. An LDS compilation entitled *Scriptures of the Church* contends that through the fall of Adam and Eve, the doors to eternal life were opened to earth-born children:

The fall of Eve and Adam is profoundly significant: they opened the way of mortality for all humankind, and they subjected themselves to death in order to make continued progression toward eternal life possible. Mother Eve bestowed upon her daughters and sons a heritage of honor, for she acted with wisdom, love, and unselfish sacrifice.³⁷

14

Because Adam and Eve were wise and unselfish, they endured death for the sake of perfection. The logical outcome of the LDS doctrine of a progressive fall is the exclusion of the doctrine of original sin from Mormon theology.

In rejecting original sin, the second *Article of Faith* of the LDS church teaches that one is not held accountable to the Heavenly Father for the transgression of Adam: "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression."³⁸ Consider what the LDS work *Scriptures of the Church* says about the nature of sin:

God does not hold one responsible for wrong done in ignorance or harm done to others unintentionally, because such actions do not constitute sin. One's ignorance, immaturity, or even recklessness may injure others, and individuals may be accountable for the consequences they help to bring about. But in such situations, where there is no ill intent, there is no sin. This does not mean that people who do wrong in ignorance do not suffer, perhaps physically or in their relationships with others.³⁹

Since Adam was in a state of innocence when he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was not considered to have sinned. Adam merely transgressed the commandment. McConkie contends that as long as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden they were unable to sin. He writes, "Adam and Eve could not commit sin while in the Garden of Eden, although laws of conduct had already been established, because the knowledge of good and evil had not yet been given them."⁴⁰ Even though Adam may have had to pay consequences for his transgression, the LDS contend that he did not

³⁷ *Scriptures of the Church: Selections from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), s.v. "Eve," by Beverly Campbell, 303.

³⁸ Smith, *Pearl of Great Price*, 60.

³⁹ *Scriptures of the Church: Selections from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, s.v. "Sin," by Bruce L. Brown and Terrance D. Olson, 595–96.

⁴⁰ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 735.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

inherit any kind of sin nature. Therefore, there was no original sin to be imputed to the descendants of Adam. Rather than original sin being imputed into Adam's descendants, mortality would be imputed, a necessary step in the Heavenly Father's plan of salvation. The transgression of Adam and Eve makes possible the progression of Adam and Eve. In Mormon doctrine, progression is the process that leads to exaltation.

The LDS Doctrine of Exaltation

15

Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of the LDS church, once said, "As man is now, God once was; as God is now man may be."⁴¹ In LDS doctrine, the fullness of salvation means becoming like God in every essential aspect. Just as the doctrine of man, the Mormon doctrine of exaltation is contingent upon the Mormon doctrine of God.

The Garden of Eden was the concourse for exaltation. The fall of Adam and Eve was the ascent toward exaltation. There are four destinations to which earth-born humans will arrive. All earth-born humans will either go to the Telestial Kingdom, Terrestrial Kingdom, Celestial Kingdom, or into Outer Darkness.⁴² The only humans who will be in Outer Darkness are pre-mortal spirit children who rebelled against the Heavenly Father in the first estate, mortals who became LDS and then rejected the faith, and post-mortal men and women who reject the LDS gospel in spirit prison.⁴³ The Telestial Kingdom is the lowest glory, the Terrestrial Kingdom is the second-lowest glory, and the Celestial Kingdom is the highest glory. Outer Darkness contains no glory at all. Only the one who reaches the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom will become an exalted being like the LDS Heavenly Father. The fullness of salvation is only for Mormons who achieve exaltation. Mormons who desire exaltation must climb many steps of progression.

The LDS church does not exclude the atonement of Jesus Christ from its doctrine of salvation. However, the LDS church rejects the traditional view of the atonement of Jesus Christ. According to Mormon doctrine, the atonement of Jesus Christ alone does not provide the fullness of salvation. Just as the fall of Adam and Eve, the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of many steps that lead to exaltation. In addition to receiving the atonement of Jesus Christ as a necessary step toward godhood, one must observe the LDS ordinances and laws. Although the LDS gospel is a works-based "gospel," grace is not excluded. However, exaltation is not produced by grace alone. The atonement of Jesus Christ, grace, plus obedience to LDS ordinances and laws pave the road toward exaltation. If one is going to become an exalted man and acquire the

⁴¹ Clyde J. Williams, *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1984), 1.

⁴² Most earth-born humans will go to the Terrestrial Kingdom, according to LDS doctrine.

⁴³ The LDS contend that the pre-mortal spirit children who rebelled against the Heavenly Father in the first estate were punished by being unable to receive a mortal body and the chance to progress.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

blessings of exaltation, then one must understand and abide by the fullness of the LDS gospel.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

The atonement of Jesus Christ is necessary for exaltation. Although the fall of Adam and Eve was part of the Heavenly Father's plan, it left earth-born humans in a state of mortality, physical death, spiritual death, and separation from the direct physical presence of the Heavenly Father. Earth-born humans were therefore unable to progress in their current condition. If the plan of the Heavenly Father was to be completed, then atonement was needed. In the *BOM*, the importance of the atonement of Jesus Christ is explained:

For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.⁴⁴

Mormons consider the atonement as one of the most fundamental events in the Heavenly Father's plan. Because of the atonement of the Mormon Jesus, immortality and resurrection were given to all mortal humans. Moreover, the atonement was another step toward exaltation for all obedient Mormons. The atonement had both universal and individual benefits.

According to LDS doctrine, Jesus Christ suffered and bled for the sins of all men in the garden of Gethsemane.⁴⁵ In *Gospel Principles*, the nature of Jesus' suffering is explained:

The Savior atoned for us by suffering in Gethsemane and by giving his life on the cross. It is impossible for us to fully understand how Christ suffered for the sins of all men. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the weight of our sins caused him to feel such agony and heartbreak that he bled from every pore. Later, as he hung upon the cross, Jesus suffered a painful death by one of the most cruel methods known to man.⁴⁶

After Jesus suffered in Gethsemane and died on the cross, he was placed in a tomb. Three days later Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead. The suffering and resurrection of Jesus

⁴⁴ Joseph Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 293.

⁴⁵ According to Mormonism, the atonement of Jesus Christ took place in the Garden of Gethsemane. The cross is de-emphasized in Mormon doctrine.

⁴⁶ *Gospel Principles*, 66.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Christ are what the LDS recognize as the atonement. Carrigan comments on the nature of the application of the atonement of the Mormon Jesus:

The Mormon Church affirms that the atonement of the Son of God will actually produce the universal redemption (resurrection unto immortality) of the entire family of Adam or the entire human race. But, the atonement of the Son will not actually result in the forensic justification of anyone or the highest degree of salvation for anyone. The atonement of the Son must be supplemented by individual acts of righteousness in order to warrant the highest degree of salvation or eternal life. The atonement of the Son produces an opportunity for all earth-born humans who died after their eighth birthday, having never heard the LDS Gospel, to meet the conditions for eternal life during a probationary period in the realm of the dead. Additionally, the sin of murder is not completely atoned for by the Son of God. The murderer will experience the resurrection and immortality because of the atonement of the Son, but the highest degree of salvation (eternal life) may only be experienced on the basis of his own individual blood atonement.⁴⁷

The atonement is universal as far as immortality and resurrection is concerned. At the resurrection, mortal men will receive an immortal body of flesh and bone. One does not have to believe in the atoning work of Christ, nor does one have to repent of sin to receive the benefits of the atonement. Simply stated, the atonement of Christ freed mortals from mortality and physical death, and made it possible for everyone to return to the direct presence of the Heavenly Father.

Whereas the atonement of the Mormon Jesus provided universal resurrection and immortality to all humans, the atonement of the Mormon Jesus did not provide universal exaltation. The universal atonement only ensured the resurrection and immortality of humans, while the individual atonement only made possible the escape from spiritual death and the return to the Heavenly Father. While the individual atonement makes progression possible, it does not ensure without doubt that one will overcome spiritual death and return to the presence of the Heavenly Father. *Gospel Principles* expounds on the nature of the individual atonement of Jesus Christ:

Christ's atonement makes it possible for us to overcome spiritual death. Although all mankind will be resurrected with a body of flesh and bone, only those who accept Christ's atonement will be saved from spiritual death. We accept Christ's atonement by repenting of our sins, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy

⁴⁷ Carrigan, "An Assessment and Critique," 265–66.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Ghost, and obeying all of the commandments. In this way we are cleansed from sin and we become worthy to return and live forever with our Heavenly Father.⁴⁸

It is not, in any sense of the word, the atonement *alone* that completes the ascent toward exaltation. The atonement plus obedience to the LDS ordinances equals exaltation. The individual atonement is only effective by obedience to LDS ordinances. Even though the LDS believe that works in addition to the atonement of Jesus Christ is the only road to exaltation, LDS do not exclude grace from their theology.

The LDS Concept of Grace

Grace has been traditionally defined as unmerited favor. In the traditional sense of the word, LDS do not exclude grace from their doctrine of salvation. However, for the LDS, grace alone is not sufficient for exaltation. A passage from the *BOM* gives great insight into the LDS concept of grace: “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”⁴⁹ Grace has its role in Mormon soteriology. The atonement of Jesus is considered to be an act of grace. However, what LDS consider grace is only effective after one has done all that one can do, and therefore, by itself cannot produce exaltation.

The LDS contend that immortality and resurrection are the only graces that may be obtained without works.⁵⁰ McConkie argues that the immortality and resurrection of all humans constitute the only “salvation by grace alone” taught by the LDS church:

Immortality is a free gift and comes without works or righteousness of any sort; all men will come forth in the resurrection because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ. In and of itself the resurrection is a form of salvation meaning that men are thereby saved from death, hell, the devil, and endless torment.... In this sense, the mere fact of resurrection is called *salvation by grace alone*. Works are not involved, neither the works of the Mosaic law nor the works of righteousness that go with the fulness of the gospel.⁵¹

The salvation to which McConkie refers is not exaltation. One who is saved by grace alone is not an exalted man. Rather, one who is saved by grace alone either goes to the Telestial or Terrestrial Kingdoms, which are not the same as the fullness of salvation. To become exalted, one must accomplish the works of righteousness that accompany the fullness of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 99–100.

⁵⁰ Grace accompanied by works is not really grace at all.

⁵¹ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 671.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

the gospel. This includes, along with the atonement and grace, obedience to LDS ordinances and laws.

LDS Ordinances and Laws

To qualify for exaltation and reach the highest level of salvation, one must obey the LDS ordinances and laws. One who does not receive the ordinances for exaltation while on earth in a mortal existence will not obtain exaltation unless the endowments are performed by proxy.⁵² In *Gospel Principles*, there is a list of the ordinances that must be received for exaltation:

1. We must be baptized and confirmed a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.
2. We must receive the Holy Ghost.
3. We must receive the temple endowment.
4. We must be married for time and all eternity.⁵³

Before one can receive the Holy Ghost, one must be baptized and confirmed a member of the LDS church. The LDS church does not baptize one who is under the age of eight years old or one who is mentally handicapped. LDS elders who are qualified by the LDS church perform the baptisms. The forgiveness of sins is only given to one who has repented of sin, and has been baptized and confirmed a member of the LDS church. After one has been baptized and confirmed a member of the LDS church, one may receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by an authorized and qualified elder of the LDS church.

Another requirement for exaltation is the temple endowment. It includes going through the temple and learning about all the sacred truths of the LDS church and doctrine. The eternal marriage is also performed in the temple as an endowment.⁵⁴ One who holds proper priesthood authority then performs an eternal marriage. Through the marriage ordinance, a couple is sealed in marriage and exists as a family for eternity. Eternal marriage makes possible the procreation of spirit children after exaltation. In order to be exalted, one must receive all of the proper ordinances that ensure exaltation.

⁵² There is an exception made for the death of infants and those who receive the ordinances by proxy.

⁵³ *Gospel Principles*, 291.

⁵⁴ Endowments in the temple are performed by proxy for the dead.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Exaltation also requires the obedience to specific Mormon church laws. In addition to the ordinances, there are eighteen laws that demand obedience for exaltation. *Gospel Principles* contains a list of the laws that must be followed in order for one to be exalted:

1. Love God and worship Him.
2. Have faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Live the law of chastity.
4. Repent of our wrong doings.
5. Pay honest tithes and offerings.
6. Be honest in our dealings with others and with the Lord.
7. Speak the truth always.
8. Obey the Word of Wisdom.
9. Search out our kindred dead and perform the saving ordinances of the gospel for them.
10. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
11. Attend our Church meetings as regularly as possible to renew our baptismal covenants. This is done as we partake of the sacrament.
12. Love and strengthen our family members in the ways of the Lord.
13. Have family and individual prayers every day.
14. Honor our parents.
15. Teach the gospel to others by word and example.
16. Study the scriptures.
17. Listen and obey the words of the prophets of the Lord.
18. Develop true charity in our lives.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., 291-92.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

For one who is unable to receive the ordinances and obey the laws, a lower level of glory is attained. One who keeps the laws and qualifies for exaltation reaps the benefits of exaltation and becomes a god. One who is exalted will live in the presence of the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, will live with family for eternity, will rear spirit children, and will have joy and all the attributes that the Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have. Finally, that one will exist as deity forever.

Biblical Strategies for Evangelizing Mormons

Reaching Mormons first requires one to understand Mormonism and then to develop biblical strategies for carrying out LDS evangelism. The first strategy to practicing any type of evangelism is to have a genuine concern for lost souls. To reach Mormons with the true gospel, one must have patience and be willing to develop lasting relationships. Many LDS church members have been a part of the LDS church since childhood, and therefore, are culturally embedded in their faith. For Mormons, giving up the LDS faith and becoming genuine followers of Christ might mean the loss of cherished family members and friends. One must be constantly aware of what one is asking a Mormon to do by following the genuine Jesus. Yet, because of one's love for lost souls, one must remain persistent in gently undermining LDS doctrines and presenting the true gospel of the Bible.

Since the doctrine of God is the doctrinal backbone of the LDS religious belief system, one might be successful at causing a Mormon to have a crisis of belief by undermining the LDS concept of this doctrine. If one is successful at undermining the LDS doctrine of God, one should present the doctrines of God, man, and salvation from a biblical perspective. Undermining LDS doctrine and presenting biblical doctrine will take a great deal of dialogue but may produce the opportunity to lead your Mormon friend to genuine salvation. If one is serious about sharing the real Jesus with Mormons, one must be knowledgeable about both Mormon doctrine and Bible doctrine; moreover, one must be ready to give reasons for one's claims about genuine Christianity.

Counteracting the LDS Doctrine of God

There are at least four strategies for counteracting the Mormon concept of God. First, one can counter the LDS doctrine of the plurality of gods by making a defense for the biblical concept of the existence of only one God.

Second, one can counteract the Mormon doctrine of the corporeality of the Heavenly Father by unveiling the biblical teaching that God is spirit. Third, one can undermine the doctrine of the LDS godhead by explaining the true nature of the Trinity as revealed in Scripture. Fourth, one can reveal the inconsistencies between Mormon church doctrine

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

and Mormon church scriptures. By unveiling inconsistencies in the Mormon concept of God, one hopes to bring an LDS church member one step closer to accepting the genuine gospel.

First, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Among many other books of the Bible, the Book of Isaiah clearly states that there is only one God: "I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other."⁵⁶

Isaiah clearly declares that there is no other God besides the LORD. Because of the English translation of the Hebrew name YHWH, the LDS contend that Isaiah is referring to Jesus. This passage in Isaiah explicitly makes the claim that there is no God besides YHWH. Since the Bible is clear that both the names YHWH (Jehovah) and Elohim refer to one God, the Bible's explicit claims about Jehovah present no problem for Bible-believing Christians.⁵⁷ Instead of teaching that there are three Gods that are unified in mind and purpose, the Bible teaches that there are three persons that are fully one God. The Bible teaches that there is a Triune God.

Wayne Grudem, professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, contends that Scripture is clear about the fact that there is only one God: "Scripture is abundantly clear that there is one and only one God. The three persons of the Trinity are one not only in purpose and in agreement on what they think, but they are one in essence, one in their essential nature. In other words, God is only one being. There are not three Gods. There is only one God."⁵⁸ The Bible teaches that the Triune God is three persons and one God. Hence, although the Bible may talk about three distinct persons, it does not teach that there is more than one God. The LDS doctrine of the plurality of gods is therefore an unbiblical doctrine.⁵⁹

Second, the Bible teaches that God is spirit. In John 4:24, Jesus Christ Himself claimed that God is spirit. In a work entitled *Integrative Theology*, the words of Jesus in John 4:24 are explained:

Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman at the well why she should worship God, not at this mountain or that, but in spirit and in truth. "God," Christ said, "is spirit"

⁵⁶ Isa. 45:5–6.

⁵⁷ See Deut. 6: 4–5.

⁵⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 238.

⁵⁹ Bible passages that are the basis for the Trinitarian concept of God are: John 1:1–18, 8:58, 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Col. 1:1–20; Phil. 2:5–7; Heb. 1–2; Titus 2:13 and 2 Pet. 1:1.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

(John 4:24). Although some interpreters take “spirit” as an attribute, the term “spirit” in Jesus’ statement is not an adjective, but a substantive. The noun “spirit” occurs first in the sentence for emphasis. And a substantive interpretation fits best with the cultural context.⁶⁰

Based on grammatical interpretation, the clear biblical teaching is that God is spirit. Moreover, according to what the Bible says in John 4:24, God has no size or dimensions. God is omnipresent, and therefore, can be worshiped anywhere. The Bible does not teach that God has a body of flesh and bone or that He is an exalted man. God the Father is essentially incorporeal spirit, and He did not physically procreate Jesus Christ. The LDS doctrine of the corporeal nature of the Heavenly Father is not found in Scripture and therefore unbiblical.

Third, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have always existed as God: “Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”⁶¹ The Triune God had no beginning and does not exist in time. Grudem contends that time did not begin until God created the universe:

When God began to create the universe, time began, and there began to be a succession of moments and events one after another. But before there was a universe, and before there was time, God always existed, without beginning, and without being influenced by time. And time, therefore, does not have existence in itself, but, like the rest of creation, depends on God’s eternal being and power to keep it existing.⁶²

Since the Triune God exists eternally outside of time, the LDS concept of the procreation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit must be rejected. The Bible does not teach that the Heavenly Father sired Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the Bible teaches that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit have existed eternally as one Triune God. The LDS teaching of the conception of Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost in the first estate is thoroughly unbiblical.

Finally, the KJV Bible and the *BOM* can be used to undermine the LDS doctrine of God.⁶³ Some LDS are not even aware that the LDS doctrine of God is different than the biblical

⁶⁰ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 195.

⁶¹ Ps. 90:2.

⁶² Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 169.

⁶³ The LDS only accept the KJV Bible as far as it is translated correctly as authoritative. In addition to the KJV Bible, LDS use the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible. Joseph Smith claimed that he fixed the errors

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

doctrine of God. One can simply present what the Mormon church teaches about the doctrine of God and what the Bible teaches about the doctrine of God and ask the Mormon if they are aware that the Church's teachings are in direct conflict with what the Bible says. On the other hand, most culturally embedded LDS are aware of what the LDS doctrine of God teaches but are not prepared to defend the LDS church's position by using the Bible alone.

Ask the Mormon if he believes that the Bible teaches the same doctrine of God that the LDS church teaches. Most LDS will answer the question in the affirmative. Next, one can ask the LDS to point out the Scriptures that are in agreement with the LDS doctrine of God. The LDS will most likely point to a verse that uses anthropomorphism. However, one who knows the context and the literary style of the Bible can quickly point out that the Bible nowhere teaches the LDS doctrine of God.

After one unveils the inconsistencies between the Bible and the LDS doctrine of God, most Mormons will claim that the Bible has been mistranslated and corrupted. One can then resort to unveiling the inconsistencies between the LDS doctrine of God and the *BOM* itself. Joseph Smith once claimed, "The Book of Mormon is the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our [the LDS] religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than any other book."⁶⁴ Ask the Mormon if he believes that what Joseph Smith said about the *BOM* is true. The LDS will most definitely answer that question in the affirmative. Next, ask the Mormon if he would demonstrate where the *BOM* teaches the LDS doctrine of God. The LDS will be unable to produce evidence that the *BOM* teaches what the LDS church teaches about the doctrine of God. Nowhere in the *BOM* is the LDS doctrine of God taught. At this point, the Mormon will either use subjective evidence to back up the LDS doctrine of God, will try to establish an argument for the continuity of revelation, or will find himself in a teachable moment. If he is in a teachable moment, that will be the perfect opportunity to share the real gospel with him.

Conclusion

Southern Baptists and evangelicals must seek to understand the LDS church and its doctrines. The LDS church is a rapidly growing cult that uses Christian terms to talk about its beliefs and practices. However, the LDS doctrines of God, man, and salvation and the biblical doctrines of God, man, and salvation are mutually exclusive. The doctrines of God, man, and salvation are fundamental to the Christian faith, and any flaw in these doctrines produces a shipwrecked gospel. The Mormon doctrine of God is the

that were in the KJV Bible. However, there is no evidence that suggests that the Bible ever really had any real errors in it for Joseph Smith to fix.

⁶⁴ Smith, Book of Mormon, intro.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

doctrinal backbone of the LDS religious belief system. If the LDS doctrine of God can be undermined, then LDS doctrines of man and salvation can be deconstructed. By unveiling inconsistencies in LDS sources of authority and LDS doctrine, one can undermine the LDS concept of God. Undermining the LDS concept of God to create a crisis of belief is not the only approach to apologetics, but it is practical and gives Mormons something to think about. The more genuinely one seeks to understand and evangelize the Mormons, the more one will develop a genuine burden for sharing the real Jesus with members of the LDS church.⁶⁵

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⁶⁵Newton, A. K. (2004). "Comprehending the Counterfeit: Understanding, Counteracting, and Evangelizing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." *Faith and Mission*, 21(3), 19–42.