

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS
FOR
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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INTRODUCTION

Sometime early in 1999, the Relief Society president of the Watauga (Texas) Ward approached Bishop Son Le with a request from the women of her organization. Friends and associates, it seems, were asking questions of these sisters that some weren't prepared to answer; they wanted help from the Bishopric. Bishop Le approached me, his first counselor, with the assignment. (Had I envisioned the size of this project, I might have resisted it)! I had the Relief Society president collect questions during her next meeting with the sisters and deliver them to me. I categorized most into ten topics and added an eleventh for miscellaneous questions. After many hours at a computer keyboard, I published "Latter-Day Questions for Latter-Day Saints" in October of 1999.

FORWARD

My comments on Mormon theology and practice are my own and should not necessarily be considered as the official position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Nor should this be considered an exhaustive treatise, but merely some observations I have made, concerning the topics in question. Comments concerning Christianity in general represent my understanding of a very diverse community of believers and should be understood in that context.

Questions submitted are summarized in the "QUESTIONS" section of each topic. There was much repetition among them and so even though your specific question may not be listed, I made an effort to address them all.

I recognize the length of this study may be discouraging to some. There was much to say, and even more could have been said. I did, however, try to divide it up in a way that topics of interest easily present themselves. Additionally, a brief answer can be obtained in the "BRIEFLY" section of each topic.

My thanks to those who contributed in any way to the content herein.

Victor Poulsen

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 1 WHAT DO MORMONS BELIEVE?

i. QUESTIONS

What exactly do Mormons believe? What do you believe in? How does your church differ from other Christian religions?

ii. BRIEFLY

Of course, the best summary of Mormon beliefs is our thirteen Articles of Faith. Any one of these can be used as a springboard into fascinating gospel discussions. When a Christian asks such a question, he is likely seeking to learn how our beliefs differ from his own. It is very helpful, therefore, to become educated in such matters. Indeed, point to point doctrine comparisons between religions are of little benefit unless more fundamental differences are first addressed. Within the context of these differences, doctrinal variances are better understood.

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. NATURE OF GOD: To my knowledge The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only major religion in all of Christendom that teaches the Godhead consists of three separate and distinct individuals. (See Matt. 3:16,17; Acts 7:55). And while much of Christianity teaches that God is an incomprehensible being, Mormonism sees Him as a fatherly figure with a glorified body of flesh and bones resembling our own. Of comprehending God, the Savior Himself declared in His great intercessory prayer,

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3).

Certainly there is much of God that we cannot comprehend. However, concerning His nature, I must believe that in order to know Him, we must be able to, in some way, comprehend Him. Perhaps the real foundation of such doctrine lies not in the notion that God, an incomprehensible being, made man but rather, man made God an incomprehensible being. Perhaps men simply must believe so. Nevertheless, ours is a concept of God that most apparently presents itself in the Bible. It is ironic that many Christian denominations teach this doctrine of a God that transcends all characteristics of man who was, in fact, created in the likeness and image of God. This incomprehensible Trinity doctrine is not well established in scripture.

What is well established is that God is our father (our Heavenly Father) and we are His children. (See Romans 8:14-18; Acts 17:28-29). And a child, born in the image of his parents, has within him the capacity of growing and maturing into something like them. Earthly parents want no less than this for their children and our heavenly parents want no less than this for us. (See Psalms 82:6; John 10:34).

2. NATURE OF MAN: Soundly rejected by Mormonism, Christendom in general, embraces the

doctrine of “original sin.” That is to say they believe that mankind, from his birth, shares the guilt of Adam’s “original sin” in the Garden of Eden. While Mormons argue that though we suffer the consequences of Adam’s transgression (e.g. we are separated from God and are subject to death), we share no guilt from it. (See 2nd Article of Faith). Thus, while traditional Christianity teaches that man is essentially evil and worthy of damnation even at birth, Mormonism teaches that man is essentially good but becomes evil as he succumbs to the temptations of mortality. The significance of this difference could not be overstated. Infant baptism and damnation for the gospel ignorant are logical consequences of such an untoward view of man. (How must God feel when men denigrate His most glorious creation in this way)?

With few exceptions, Christianity sees man as consisting of both a physical and a spiritual element. So when the physical body dies, the spirit lives on forever. Mormonism further teaches that man’s eternal nature extends not only beyond, but prior to mortality. (See Jer. 1:4,5; John 9:1,2). Indeed, a “spirit” simply represents man in different stages of his progression--a pre-mortal MAN who awaits mortality or a post-mortal MAN who awaits resurrection. It was a third of our spirit brothers and sisters that rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven before they could be born into mortality. (See Rev. 12:4; 7-9).

Traditional Christianity has a more complex view of spirit beings. Because they reject any notion of man’s pre-mortal existence, any spirit creation must be something else entirely. Indeed, the war in heaven, angelic visitations, and heavenly hosts have nothing to do with man, but rather, involved beings who were created very differently. So while we were created as physical beings, they were created as and will always remain, spiritual beings.

This different view of man is reflected in our sense of relationship to God. Mormonism sees the earthly family as being patterned after, and indeed, an extension of the heavenly family. As the spirit offspring of God (Acts 17:28,29), we lived with and were nurtured by our Heavenly Parents just as here we are now nurtured by our earthly ones. Thus, there is an authenticity in our references to each other as “brothers” and “sisters” and to God as our “Father” that cannot exist elsewhere in Christianity.

Traditional Christianity believes mankind to be the children of God only in the sense that He created us and endowed us with some divine characteristics. Certainly He loves us in the way that any father loves his children.

3. THE ETERNITIES (HEREAFTER): Mormons believe in four eventual destinations for the soul of man--the “three degrees of glory,” and “Outer Darkness.” (See 1 Cor. 15:40-42; 2 Cor. 12:2). These three heavens--the Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telesstial Kingdoms--“receive the presence” of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost respectively while Outer Darkness is a place of no glory. (See D&C 76:62,77,86; Alma 40:13,14). They are inhabited by those who did not deny the divine being with whom they have presence. (See D&C 76:79,83) “Heaven,” in Mormon vernacular, is typically a reference to the Celestial Kingdom. And it is here that some of our most cherished beliefs concerning the potential of man are realized--eternal family, and Eternal Life. Mormons believe in a pre-mortal life and a post-mortal Spirit World wherein man awaits his resurrection and final judgment. It is here that the ignorant finally have their opportunity to hear the gospel from those who have already accepted it. (See 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6).

Traditional Christianity sees two destinations--heaven and hell. Some Christians do believe in different heavenly “rewards,” however, making their view more compatible with our own. Heaven is inhabited with “saved” souls who dwell, as individuals (i.e. without continuation of earthly relationships or institutions such as marriage and family), in the presence of Jesus. (Thus their heaven is very similar to our Terrestrial Kingdom). A man’s final judgment and reward is received immediately upon death.

4. SALVATION: We must take great care in using the word “salvation” in discussions with others who may understand its meaning differently than we do. Depending on its context, Mormon’s use the word “salvation” in three ways:

- Saved from Spiritual Death--synonymous with “exaltation” or “Eternal Life” in the Celestial Kingdom.
- Saved in the Kingdom of God (which includes all three glories).
- Saved from Physical Death--synonymous with “resurrection.”

I usually try to use it in a way that is best understood by the Christian to whom I am speaking, who would normally think of “salvation” as life hereafter with Jesus as opposed to life with Satan. (This is probably most consistent with the second of the three definitions given).

Mormons believe, as Nephi eloquently expressed, “...for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). And that which we must “do” is obey God’s commandments (i.e. do “good works”). (See John 14:15; 15:14). There is a rather curious and unfortunate assumption among many Christians that the principles of “works” and “grace” are mutually exclusive. I often explain their association with a little allegory similar to one told by Stephen Robinson in his book, “*Believing Christ*.”

While shopping with her father, a small girl sees a bicycle that she dearly wants to have. Her understanding father instructs her to save her money for a period of time after which they would return and buy the bicycle. The little girl diligently follows her father’s instructions, saving her nickels and dimes, until the long awaited day arrives. Once again in the store with the shiny new bicycle before them, the father asks his daughter if she has saved her money as he instructed, to which she proudly presents him her tiny hand filled with coins. Knowing it to be far short of the actual cost, the father takes her money and tells her how proud he is of her efforts. He then picks up the bicycle and buys it for his beloved child.

The price paid by the father for his daughter’s happiness, then, is analogous to the price Jesus paid for us when He accomplished the atonement. Those who reject any need for “works,” often quote Eph. 2:8-9 (“*For by grace are ye saved through faith...*”) to support their position while Mormons counter with James 2:14-26 (“...*faith without works is dead...*”). There is no conflict in these verses. Paul is simply saying that your “tiny hand full of coins” can’t possibly buy the “bicycle.” While James is merely warning that it must not be empty.

Catholicism seems to agree that both grace and works are necessary for salvation but Protestantism is difficult to generalize here. Certainly the more conservative or fundamental sects vehemently reject the notion that “good works” contribute, in any way, toward salvation. For them, acceptance

of Jesus' atoning sacrifice is not only necessary, but also SUFFICIENT for receiving God's saving grace.

I've discussed the issue of grace and works extensively with proponents of (for lack of a better term) "grace-only salvation" and I find their argument a weak one. It is easy to think of good "works" as helping old ladies across the street (and the like) but it really entails obedience to the commandments of God. AND HAVING FAITH IN JESUS IS EVERY BIT AS MUCH A COMMANDMENT AS IS REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM. (See Matt. 22:37,38; Mark 16:16; Luke 13:3; 1 John 3:23). I see nothing fundamentally different between accepting Jesus' sacrifice and, in the same breath, asking for forgiveness. Only "Universalism" (the tenet that God will save ALL men) truly teaches that works are superfluous. Yet, like the doctrine of the Trinity, many Protestants are uncomfortable with the rejection of works. Indeed, most Protestants seem to agree that SOME DEGREE OF GOODNESS IS NECESSARY TO GO TO HEAVEN even if their church officially teaches otherwise.

It is interesting to ask disciples of "grace-only salvation" about the PURPOSE of God's commandments to men if obedience to them is irrelevant to salvation. One common response is that commandments exist to prove to us the futility of our trying to obey them thus demonstrating that grace is our ONLY recourse. (Curiously, the principle of repentance seems all but absent from such theology). In other words, we can't possibly OBEY the Ten Commandments (for instance) so we must acknowledge this fact and turn to God for salvation. Paul said this:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13).

In summary, permit another allegory. (This one is my own).

Life is a race. The finish line is Heaven. Many insurmountable obstacles lie in the way. You begin the race running with all your might. You trip and fall injuring yourself. In your present state, you are incapable of finishing the race. So you pray...

Protestant Christian Prayer: "Oh God, I am but a miserable man, incapable of continuing. I give my life to you and pray that you carry me to the finish line where I may dwell with you forever."

Mormon Prayer: "Oh God, I have succumbed to the weakness of the flesh. Though I cannot continue in my present state, I pray you to heal me and point the way that I might stand and run again."

5. JUSTICE: I include this topic because it is so fundamental in understanding our differences with other Christians. God is just. On that point we all agree. But what does that mean? As it turns out, Mormons claim a very good understanding of divine justice while, I believe, much of Christianity will ultimately concede that they do not. To Mormons, justice means that the individual determines his own destiny, and that salvation is equally available to all men who have ever lived. (I

make such a declaration in the context that this justice is only available to us because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ).

The doctrine of “original sin,” destines man to Hell even before he is born. Indeed, even a hypothetical sinless man is predestined to damnation. (One must ask why God would create such a being. Does this, somehow, glorify Him?) To the Mormon who believes that “men will be punished for their own sins,” such a belief cannot be reconciled with justice. (See 2nd Article of Faith; compare Deut. 24:16). It may be argued that much of what God does seems unjust such as when the Children of Israel were commanded to kill every living thing that inhabited the lands of their inheritance. (See Deut. 20:16). And that we can only take comfort in the fact that God has declared Himself just, even if that justice transcends our understanding. But why would God tell us He is just if we can’t possibly understand what that means? In any event, trying to establish God’s justice based on events that occur during this moment in eternity, called mortality, is myopic. God is just because man’s ETERNAL fate is just.

6. SIN: Mormons see sin in the context of its seriousness. For instance murder is a more egregious sin than petty theft. But much of Christianity teaches that, qualitatively and quantitatively, sin cannot be graded (again, a view that probably enjoys more official than popular acceptance). Indeed, to believe such would invalidate their view of the Eternities. After all, for such an one who believes “saved” people go to heaven (as opposed to “good” people), any amount of sin for the “unsaved” must result in exactly the same eternal damnation. Yet, IN HIS SHORT SOJOURN IN MORTALITY, IS MAN CAPABLE OF COMMITTING INFINITE SIN, THAT GOD JUDGES HIM WORTHY OF INFINITE PUNISHMENT? (This question, perhaps like no other, reaches into the very heart of Christian theology. Its answer speaks volumes about ones beliefs.) If your only sin was to steal a pencil, should your punishment be exactly the same as that of a mass murderer? With such a “black or white” view of sin, it makes no sense to grade its severity or to speak of it in degrees. In this context it is easy to understand why even the most conservative of denominations might be very reticent to discipline its members for ANY sin, because to do so would suggest that the sins of the accused are more serious than those of the disciplinarian.

(There is a very interesting, even contradictory, relationship between this view of sin and the doctrine of “original sin.” Mormons agree with the rest of Christianity that no man is sinless. So if man’s own sins are sufficient to damn him, why does he need Adam’s “sin” to accomplish the same thing? Indeed, one is compelled to question what theological purpose is served by this doctrine that is so vigorously defended by its disciples.)

Mormon theology teaches that those who do not take advantage of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice will be punished for their own sins. The nature and duration of that punishment is not known. However, contrary to traditional Christian theology, we can conclude that it will be finite (consonant with finite sin) in duration simply because it will conclude prior to Judgment day. (See D&C 76:38,85). The judged then goes to the place where, ultimately, he WANTS to be--with those of his own kind in a world of his own fancy. (See D&C 88:22-24). JUSTICE, AFTER ALL, REQUIRES THAT PUNISHMENT BE COMMENSURATE WITH THE SIN COMMITTED.

7. CHURCH AUTHORITY: One of the most elemental differences between Protestant, Catholic, and Mormon theologies is the foundation of our respective faiths. Protestant Christian theology derives its authority from the Bible. (I argue in the SCRIPTURE section that their justification for

doing so has more to do with tradition than Biblical exegesis). Catholicism, on the other hand, quotes Matt. 16:17 to make a strong argument that Peter (which means “rock”) is the foundation of the church. Having originated with Peter, then, this foundation is perpetuated through Papal authority. Mormon theology uses this same verse together with Eph. 2:20 to contend that it is the “rock” of REVELATION to Apostles and Prophets upon which God’s kingdom on earth should be founded. The implications of this difference alone are legion.

8. CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNMENT: With the Catholic argument that Peter’s authority has been perpetuated through its line of Popes, and the Mormon position that his authority was restored and perpetuated through its line of prophets, it stands to reason that these two denominations should have strong central governments. Protestant sects, who derive their authority from the Bible, consist of mostly autonomous churches with little or no central control. While one may argue the merits and faults of both systems, it certainly explains the succinct character of Mormon and Catholic theologies and the tremendous diversity in Protestant beliefs. A word about church government.

Some of our detractors charge that the Mormon church is authoritarian. While use of the word "authoritarian" suggests the absence of freedom and personal agency among Mormon people (a charge which even they know to be false), it is true that Mormons view obedience to authority, especially divine authority, as a virtue. Though they certainly intend malice with such charges, I'm not sure that most Christians would regard obedience to divine law as a character flaw either. Nevertheless, the dangers of obedience to the wrong authority are acknowledged. But what about their own form of church government? Is it without risk?

Protestant denominations are (and I don't mean to be flippant or cynical in this presentation), organized with essentially democratic governments and operate in a type of "free-market" environment. (I say "Protestantism" to deliberately exclude the Catholic church which, like Mormonism, has a strong central government). A typical Protestant church is not unlike a bank in the sense that if it serves its patrons well it will prosper and grow. If not, it will stagnate or even close. Among Christians, a given Protestant church is literally in competition for patrons with other surrounding churches EVEN OF LIKE DENOMINATION! Their product is ministrations which includes preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ according to their understanding.

Products produced in a free-market system are, first and foremost, useful and attractive with a price reflective of its quality. Consistent with the principles of democracy, it is the PEOPLE that ultimately determine the fate of a product--whether it becomes a part of everyday life or vanishes forever from the shelves of distributors. It is THEIR multiplicity of likes and needs that drives the production of a multiplicity of products.

I think most Protestants must concede that their churches have, indeed, been governed by such principles. Imagine, then, the possible effects on gospel truths after centuries in such an environment. Preachers "walk on eggshells" knowing that the very people they must "call to repentance" are the same to whom they owe their living. Such could ill-afford to offend their congregations lest they take their donations and membership to the church down the street. And make no mistake, the truth is offensive to some people.

This type of spiritual democracy would allow "truth" to be established based on public opinion

expressed via voting and other support processes, such as is presently occurring with the fundamentalist/moderate rift in a number of Protestant denominations. Truth might be amended in the same way we amend our U.S. Constitution. Abortion and other evils are extant in a democratic society, not because they are right, but because they are popular. One might easily predict that, under these circumstances, the gospel would evolve into an diluted, innocuous, agreeable perversion of the same.

Though I have unavoidably done so, it is not my purpose to suggest that this has happened in the Christian World (or to what degree) but rather to point out, in the context of Protestant criticism of our form of church government, that there are some very real and serious dangers with their own. One might concede the danger of evolving "truth" in a democratic church government but argue that it is tempered, if not eliminated, by the absoluteness of the Bible. Certainly the Bible has such an effect but to what degree? There are hundreds of denominations that claim membership in the Christian community with each their own unique doctrines and belief systems. As the above mentioned divisions illustrate, THE CHRISTIAN WORLD IS LIVING PROOF THAT THE BIBLE IS SUBJECT TO INTERPRETATION. Yet it is only effective in establishing absolute truth to the degree that its teachings are unmistakable.

In determining the proper form of church government, it might well be asked how the Kingdom of God will be governed when the Savior returns to claim His own. Will it be a Democracy where ultimate authority resides with the people, or will it be a Theocracy where ultimate authority resides with God? (See *“Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,”* pp. 250-252). Yes, stories of Mormon autocracy and authoritarianism, consistent with their intent, strike fear in the hearts of those who are familiar with mankind’s history of political despots and dictators who maintained strict obedience to their authority through tyranny and fear. But Mormonism asserts that Jesus Christ stands at the head of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that its Priesthood structure of authority is filled with men of God whom He has called to serve and whom members vote to sustain.

Don't misunderstand my message. Democracy is an inspired form of civil government. It is the ONLY real option when leaders are imperfect. It is based on the correct and proven principle that COLLECTIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS IS MORE CONSTANT AND PREDICTABLE THAN INDIVIDUAL RIGHTEOUSNESS. Nevertheless, you don't have to be very old to see that even societal morals change over time. What once was ugly sin is now acceptable behavior and our democratic laws reflect the change. No, democracy is the means by which MEN govern men. And Theocracy, which is to a degree authoritarian in nature, is the means by which GOD governs men. And I think that says it all.

iv. FURTHER STUDY

Articles of Faith; *“Articles of Faith”* (by James E. Talmage); *“What do Mormons Believe?”* (by Rex Lee); *“The Mormon Faith: A New Look at Christianity”* (by Robert Millet); *“How Wide the Divide: A Mormon and Evangelical in Conversation”* (by Stephen Robinson and C. Blomberg); *“Christian Churches of America”* (by Milton Backman); *“Religions of the World”* (by Palmer & Keller)

NATURE OF GOD - T.G. (“God”); *Bible Dictionary* (“God”)

NATURE OF MAN - T.G. (“Man”, “Nature, Human”); *Mormon Doctrine* (“Original Sin Theory”, “Pre-existence”)

THE ETERNITIES (HEREAFTER) - *T.G.* (“Hereafter”)

SALVATION - This Document / TEMPLES (“Baptism for the Dead”); 2 Cor. 15:55-58; *T.G.* (“Salvation”)

JUSTICE - *T.G.* (“Justice”)

SIN - Isa. 1:18; Acts 2:38; 3:19; *T.G.* (“Sin”)

CHURCH AUTHORITY - Amos 3:7; 1 Cor. 3:11; Heb. 5:4; *T.G.* (“Authority”)

CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNMENT - Eph. 4:11-16; *T.G.* (“Church Organization”)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 2 WHO’S IN HEAVEN?

i. QUESTIONS

Will members of other churches be in heaven? Why do Mormons believe that theirs is the only true church? What becomes of righteous people?

ii. BRIEFLY

Like many Christians, Mormons believe that the heavens will be filled with good, honest, decent people of all walks of life and religious philosophies. Each, however, will receive a reward commensurate with his life’s works and relationship to God. It is the purpose of religion to define the rewards of heaven and the requirements for admittance there. And Mormons believe that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is best able to do so.

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. NON-MORMONS: Religious philosophies (such as those of Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, and even Islam) that see the eternities in the Judeo-Christian tradition, believe in a God-governed heaven and a Satan-governed hell. This context is extremely important when addressing the issue of their adherents’ place in the eternities. By suggesting, for instance, that a Baptist or even a Muslim is not “going to heaven,” we have, in their own minds at least, condemned them forever to the clutches of Satan--a doctrine completely inconsistent with Mormon theology.

We must remember that the Kingdom of God INCLUDES the Telestial and Terrestrial Kingdoms. (See 1 Cor. 15:40-42). And although the scriptures often refer to the Telestial Kingdom as “Hell,” it is only such in the sense that it is the least heaven has to offer. After suffering the consequences of their unrepented sin (D&C 19:16-18), those that will inhabit these lesser kingdoms do so in the presence of deity and are partakers in the glory of God. They are, in a very real sense, IN heaven!

2. MORMONS: And what of the Mormons? Are we saved? Our hesitation in responding positively to such an inquiry is, perhaps, due to our reluctance to declare ourselves exalted (i.e. destined for the Celestial Kingdom). But that was NOT the question! The inquirer knows nothing of exaltation. He simply wants to know if you are going to heaven or hell. And for all he knows of heaven, the answer is a resounding YES!

“All of the faithful Saints. All of those who have endured to the end, depart this life with the absolute guarantee of Eternal Life.

“There is no equivocation, no doubt, no uncertainty in our minds. Those who have been true and faithful in this life will not fall by the wayside in the life to come. If firm and true in the testimony of our blessed Lord, they shall come forth with an inheritance of Eternal Life.

“We do not mean to say that those who die in the Lord and who are true and faithful in this life, must be perfect in all things when they go into the next sphere of

existence. There was only one perfect man--the Lord Jesus whose father was God.

“But what we are saying is that when the saints of God chart a course of righteousness, when they gain sure testimonies of the truth and divinity of the Lord’s work. When they keep the commandments, when they overcome the world, when they put first in their lives the things of God’s kingdom: when they do all these things, and then depart this life--though they have not yet become perfect--they shall nonetheless gain Eternal Life in our Father’s kingdom: and eventual they shall be perfect as God their Father and Christ His Son are perfect.” (Bruce R. McConkie - Oct. ‘76 Gen. Conf.)

3. “ONLY TRUE CHURCH:” The phrase “only true church” is used (and often abused) to separate us from the Christian world in general. The difficulty with such an expression is its implicit suggestion that the other religious denominations in question have no truth when quite the contrary is true.

Any body of pure truth, whether it be religious, scientific or trivial in nature, CANNOT contain contradiction. When contradiction exists, one of two possible conclusions must be reached--either one of the conflicting ideas is false, or they are both false together. The Christian World, with its multitude of denominations, is what it is because of conflict. In fact, the very name “Protestant” alludes to a historical conflict with the Catholic Church. Thus, the declaration “only true church” simply means that, where conflict exists, Mormons look to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to provide the correct information.

iv. FURTHER STUDY

1 Cor. 15:58; D&C 76; D&C 88; *Bible Dictionary* (“Kingdom of Heaven”); *“Have You Been Saved?”* (by Dallin H. Oaks - Apr. ‘98 Gen. Conf.)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 3

JOSEPH SMITH AND PROPHETS

i. QUESTIONS

Who is Joseph Smith and why he is a prophet? What is a prophet? Have any of Joseph Smith's writings or translations been disproved?

ii. BRIEFLY

Specifically, a "Prophet" is a select individual who prophesies or speaks of future events made known to him by God. In another context, however, a Prophet is anyone who has a testimony of Jesus. (See Rev. 19:10). Latter-day Saints sustain members of the First Presidency (the church president and his counselors) and the quorum of the twelve Apostles as "prophets, seers, and revelators." (A "seer" is one who sees visions and a "revelator" reveals God's word). Nevertheless, when a Mormon speaks of "the Prophet," he is referring to the president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Like Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the Apostles before him, Joseph Smith restored gospel truths to mankind ushering in this final dispensation (dispensing of the gospel) called "The Fullness of Times." Of these truths, Hugh B. Brown declared:

"...And for over a hundred years, some of the best students and scholars of the world have been trying to prove that the Book of Mormon was not the word of God and they've taken the Bible to try to prove it and not one of them has been able to prove that anything he [Joseph Smith] wrote was not in strict harmony with the scriptures, with the Bible, with the word of God."

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. BIBLICAL PATTERN: Following, is an excerpt from a talk entitled "Profile of a Prophet" given by the late Apostle Hugh B. Brown wherein he defends Mormonism before a British judge as he would any other "legal problem."

... I said, "Perhaps we could have an examination for discovery, here, and see whether there is some area of agreement, and from there we can start to discuss my fantastic ideas."

He agreed to that quite readily and I said, "Of course, I am proceeding on the assumption that you are a Christian." "Certainly."

"I assume you believe the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, to be the word of God." "I do."

"You believe what's written in the book." "Certainly, yes."

"You say that my statement that God spoke to a man, in this age, is fantastic and absurd." "To me, it is."

"Do you believe that God ever did speak to anyone?" "Well, certainly, all through

the Bible, we have evidence of that."

"Did he speak to Adam?" "Yes."

"Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, and on through the prophets?" "I believe he spoke to every one of them."

"Do you believe that that kind of contact between God and man ceased at the meridian of time, or when Jesus appeared?" "No," he said, "It reached its climax, its apex, on that occasion."

"Do you believe that God spoke through Jesus?" "Yes."

"Was he the Son of God?" "He was."

"Do you believe, sir, that..." and I'm going to have to shorten this considerably because I said it took me three hours to tell it to him and I must tell it to you in less than thirty minutes. "Do you believe, sir, that after Jesus was resurrected, and after he ascended into heaven, and I assume you think he did ascend into heaven." "I do."

"Do you believe that a certain lawyer, sometimes referred to a tent maker, by the name of Saul, of Tarsus, on his way to Damascus, contacted that very individual, namely, Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified, and had ascended into heaven, do you believe that Saul saw a light and heard a voice." "I do."

"Whose voice was it?" "It was the voice of Jesus Christ, for he so introduced himself."

"Then, my Lord," and that's the way we speak to Justices in the British Empire, "My Lord, I am submitting to you, in all seriousness, that it is-- has been standard procedure, throughout all recorded time, for God to talk to men."

He said, "I think I'll have to admit that. Except that it stopped shortly after the first century of the Christian Era."

"Why did it stop?" "I can't say."

"You think God hasn't spoken since then?" "I'm sure he hasn't."

"There must be a reason, can you give me a reason?" "I-- do not know."

"May I suggest a reason, or several."

"Perhaps God does not speak to man anymore because he can't. He's lost the power." He said, "Of course, that would be blasphemous."

"Well then-- if you don't accept that, perhaps he doesn't speak to men anymore because he doesn't love us anymore. He's gone off and left us to-- find our own way in the dark." Well, he said, "God loves all men of all ages, and is no respecter of persons."

"Well, then, if he could speak, if he loves us, then the only other possible answer, as I see it, is that-- we don't need him. We've made such rapid strides, we're so well educated, we have such great science-- we don't need God anymore."

And then he said, and his eyes were moist when he said it, "Mr. Brown, there never was an age in the history of the world, there never was a people or a time, when the voice of God was needed as is needed now." And then he said, "Can you tell me why he doesn't speak?"

My answer was, "My Lord, he does. He has spoken. He is now speaking. And all we need is the faith to hear him."

2. PROFILE: Following, are two excerpts from a talk entitled "*Profile of a Prophet*" give by the late Apostle Hugh B. Brown wherein he defends Mormonism before a British judge as he would any other "legal problem."

... And as a student of the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith, for more than fifty years, I say to you young men and women, there is no claim which any prophet has made, in connection with his prophetic calling, which Joseph Smith cannot qualify under.

Think it through.

I said to this friend of mine, "I believe that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God, because he talked like a prophet, he taught like a prophet, he lived and died like a prophet. I believe he was a prophet of God because he gave to this world some of the greatest of all revelation. I believe that he was a prophet of God because he predicted many things in the future which have come to pass since the prediction, things which only God could bring to pass."

I said to him and I say to you, "I believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God because John on the Isle of Patmos, the beloved disciple of Jesus, declared that 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'"

And I submit to you and I submitted to him, that if any man whoever lived had a testimony of Jesus and gave his life for that testimony, and was effective in spreading the testimony, and bringing convincing evidences of the truth of the statement that Jesus is the Christ-- among all the men that have lived, I challenge any man to show one who has given us more real evidences of the divine calling of Jesus Christ than did the Prophet Joseph Smith.

... I said to my friend, "My Lord, I cannot understand you saying to me that my claims are fantastic. Nor can I understand why Christians, who claim to believe in Christ, would persecute and put to death, a man whose whole purpose was to prove the truth of the thing they themselves were declaring-- namely, that Jesus was the Christ.

I can understand them persecuting Joseph, and the rest of us, if he had said, "I am Christ," or if he had said, "There is no Christ," or if he had said, "Someone else is Christ." Then Christians, believing in Christ, would-- might-- would be justified to some extent, at least, in persecuting, or disputing with him at least.

But what he said was, "He, whom ye ignorantly serve, declare I unto you," paraphrasing what Paul said, in Athens, "He, whom ye ignorantly worship, declare I unto you."

And Joseph came to Christians and said to them, "You've been claiming to believe in Jesus Christ, I say to you that I saw him, and I talked with him. He is the Son of God."

When Joseph came out of that woods, at least four fundamental truths came out with him, and he announced them to the world. First, that the Father and the Son were separate and distinct individuals. Secondly, that the canon of scripture is not complete. Thirdly, that man was created in the image of God. And fourth, that revelation or the channel between the earth and the heavens is open and is continuous.

3. FALSE PROPHET: Like any prophet who has ever lived, Joseph Smith stands accused by Mormon detractors of being a false prophet. As proof they often point to his polygamy and to an unfulfilled prophesy. Of the former, I can only suggest that a scholarly critic would not likely make

such a charge because it simultaneously indites our most beloved Old Testament prophets. The latter is a reference to Joseph's prophesy of a temple in Missouri, "*For verily this generation shall not pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord...*" (D&C 84:5). Of course, "generation" can mean many things only one of which would render this a "false prophesy." At first glance this may sound like a weak argument except that nearly 2000 years ago THE SAVIOR USED ALMOST IDENTICAL WORDS IN PREDICTING THE END OF THE WORLD. (See Matt. 24:34). Nor is Deut. 18:21,22 proof that all God inspired prophesies must be fulfilled. Consider, for instance, the story of the Prophet Jonah told in Jonah chapters 3 and 4 wherein his prophesy of the destruction of Ninevah went unfulfilled.

There are also a number of individuals who have declared Joseph Smith's translations to be fraudulent. A little research finds, however, that it is they who are the frauds. One such example is self-proclaimed Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson whose claims that The Book of Abraham was phony launched him into a lucrative career selling anti-Mormonism. In fact, he was a High School dropout who purchased several phony degrees from bogus universities. In Arizona, he challenged anyone to refute his translation of the Book of Abraham. Robert and Rosemary Brown accepted the challenge and wrote a book about it-- "*They Lie in Wait to Deceive.*" The book exposes Nelson, and others like him, as the avaricious opportunists they are.

iv. FURTHER STUDY

Ninth Article of Faith; Gen. 2:4; Jer. 18:5-10; Amos 3:7; Rev. 19:10; D&C 56:4; 101:2; *T.G.* ("Prophets"); *Bible Dictionary* ("Prophet"); "*Joseph, The Man and the Prophet*" (by Dallin H. Oaks - April '96 Gen. Conf.)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 4 ARE MORMONS CHRISTIAN?

i. QUESTIONS

Are Mormons Christian? Do you believe that Jesus is God? Do you believe in Christ? Is the Mormon Church a cult?

ii. BRIEFLY

Our first Article of Faith states, “*We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.*” All three are members of the Godhead and maintain unique and separate identities. Mormonism does not deny the deity of Jesus. Indeed, we believe that in His premortal life, Jesus was Jehovah--God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is LORD; the great I AM; the Creator of this world; the God of our fathers. It is ONLY through His atonement that we are released from the shackles of death and hell. (See third Article of Faith).

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. “NOT CHRISTIAN:” Defending yourself against accusations of being “non-Christian” is a little bit like defending yourself against accusations of being ugly--there is little you can do to change perception. We belong to The Church of JESUS CHRIST of Latter-day Saints. That ought to be enough said. I have been told that I'm not a Christian. (I responded on one occasion, “Do you think I lie awake at night worrying about the fact that you don't think I'm a Christian?”) It's all rather silly to me so I don't tend to make an issue of it. I know who my Savior is.

2. “DIFFERENT JESUS:” The suggestion that Mormons are not Christian because we believe in a “different Jesus” is an argument often repeated by Mormon detractors. It's a curious assertion, really, and I've often wondered at its meaning. There is, after all, only one Christ--Jesus of Nazareth born 2000 years ago in Bethlehem. If we disagree on who he was and what he taught, then let that be the basis of our debate. There is no other Jesus.

3. “CULT:” The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines “cult” as,

“1) A system or community of religious worship and ritual. 2) Obsessive devotion or veneration for a person, principle or ideal. 3) An exclusive group of persons sharing an esoteric interest.”

According to this definition, any religion is properly called a cult. Nor is there any negative connotation here. Yet malice is certainly intended when some Christians apply this label to Mormonism. What they really mean to suggest is that Mormonism is a subversive cult.

How ironic it is that Mormonism with its credo, “*The glory of God is Intelligence*” (D&C 93:36), which encourages its adherents to seek all kinds of secular and spiritual learning, should be labeled as a subversive cult, a defining attribute of which is the CONTROL OF INFORMATION. (A loss

of such control contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union). Indeed, the WORST possible thing any subversive organization could do is to send its young impressionable members out into the real world to be exposed to all kinds of contrary ideas. (Subversive groups thrive on isolationism). Yet this is exactly what Mormonism does with its vast missionary force. So while some Christian clergy forbid their flocks from reading The Book of Mormon or talking to Mormon missionaries, Latter-day Saints are studying all kinds of Christian and even non-Christian philosophies in order to be more effective missionaries or to simply satisfy a curiosity. So who is the subversive cult here?

4. TRINITY: The official, if not popular, doctrine of much of Christianity is that The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are consubstantial (of one substance). I have heard this doctrine of the “Trinity” described this way. H₂O can exist in three different forms--ice, water, or steam--but it is all still H₂O. The inconsistencies of such a doctrine are too numerous to mention here. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost together constitute the Godhead. They are united into one God beside whom there is no other. Timothy 2:5 is just one of numerous verses that testify of their separate nature.

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;”

Indeed, the notion of Christ's mediating function between man and God is made vacant and meaningless in the context of a consubstantial Father and Son. In my opinion, this point alone provides a powerful refutation of the consubstantial Trinity doctrine. The theological ramifications of weakening Jesus' role as an arbitrator and intercessor are profound and far reaching.

5. SAVIOR: Simply spoken, the Fall of Adam brought spiritual and physical death to the world necessitating the Atonement of Jesus Christ. "Spiritual death" is separation from our spiritual home--God, just as physical death is separation from our temporal home--mortality. Exaltation and resurrection, then, annul spiritual and physical death respectively. As our “Savior,” Jesus provided both.

6. MEDIATOR: Boyd K. Packer gives a wonderful allegory illustrating our view of the Savior and His role in our salvation entitled, "The Mediator."

There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.

He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to do and to have what he wanted right now, and that was what seemed important.

The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.

But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.

Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.

"I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so," he confessed.

"Then," said the creditor, "we will exercise the contract, take your possessions, and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced."

"Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?" the debtor begged. "Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?"

The creditor replied, "Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?"

"I believed in justice when I signed the contract," the debtor said. "It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well."

"It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty," the creditor replied. "That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice."

There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.

"If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy," the debtor pleaded.

"If I do, there will be no justice," was the reply.

"Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?"

There is a way! The law of justice can be fully satisfied and mercy can be fully extended--but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.

The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.

"I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison."

As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, "You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just."

And so the creditor agreed.

The mediator turned then to the debtor. "If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?"

"Oh yes, yes," cried the debtor, "You save me from prison and show mercy to me."

"Then," said the benefactor, "you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison."

And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken.

"The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied.

Each of us lives on a kind of spiritual credit. One day the account will be closed, a settlement demanded. However casually we may view it now, when that day comes

*and the foreclosure is imminent, we will look around
in restless agony for someone, anyone to help us.*

*And, by eternal law, mercy cannot be extended save there be one who is both
willing and able to assume our debt and pay the price and arrange the terms for our
redemption.*

("Ensign," May 1977, pp.54-55)

iv. FURTHER STUDY

“NOT CHRISTIAN” - Alma 46:15; Acts 11:26; 26:28; *T.G.* (“Christian”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Christian”); *"Are Mormons Christians?"* (by Stephen Robinson);

“CULT” - *Mormon Doctrine* (“Sects”)

TRINITY - Gen. 1:26; 11:7; Matt. 12:31-32; 26:39; 27:46; Luke 3:21,22; John 8:42; 14:28; 20:17; Acts 7:55,56; Heb. 1:1-3

SAVIOR / MEDIATOR - *T.G.* (“Jesus”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Christ”)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 5 POLYGAMY

i. QUESTIONS

Do you believe in polygamy? Do Mormons still practice polygamy? Why did Mormons practice polygamy and when and why did they stop?

ii. BRIEFLY

As part of the “*restitution of all things*” (Acts 3:21), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began the practice of polygamy or “plural marriage” early in its history. Perhaps ten to twenty percent of church members engaged in its practice. With considerable financial and political pressures from the federal government facing His Saints, and the purposes for its practice largely realized, the Lord intervened and ended polygamy in the year 1890. (See D&C “*Official Declaration--1*”). Polygamy has not been sanctioned by the LDS Church since that time and Mormons found practicing it today face disciplinary action.

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. WHY?: The question of why polygamy should be practiced among the peoples of God is perhaps best answered in the second chapter of Jacob, “*if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people*” (Jacob 2:30). Polygamy allows a meager and vulnerable people, especially one whose male population has been ravaged by war or conflict, to rapidly increase their numbers and viability. While Judeo-Christian history suggests that God's people have often faced such circumstances (which also well describes early Mormonism), the church doesn't face such a problem today.

Polygamy also established family support mechanisms whereby women could care for each other and their children during long absences of their husbands who were often serving missions for the church.

2. BIBLICAL PATTERN: Polygamy was, of course, widely practiced in the Kingdom of God in Biblical times. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and others had more than one wife. It is inconceivable that these great men of God lived in continuous adulterous relationships during the duration of their prophetic callings as is often argued. God told David, “*I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's WIVES into thy bosom...*” (2 Sam 12:8). Indeed, the Law of Moses REQUIRED polygamy under certain circumstances. (See Deut. 25:5-10). The practice, called “Levirate Marriage,” obligated a man to marry his brother's widow. Little is said of polygamy in the New Testament. Paul taught that a Bishop should be the “*husband of one wife*” (1 Tim. 3:2). This statement is as interesting for what it doesn't say as for what it does. Why would Paul even make such a statement to a people among whom polygamy was not already an accepted practice? (Also see the story of Judah and Tamara in chapter 38 of Genesis).

3. MODERN POLYGAMY: Polygamy is still practiced among Mormon splinter groups mostly

concentrated in southern Utah and northern Arizona. Although individuals belonging to these sects refer to themselves as “Mormons,” they have no affiliation with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--known to the world as the “Mormon” church.

4. APOLOGY: Though it is tempting to do so, we as Latter-day Saints need not feel disposed to apologize for our history of polygamy. Clearly, even from a Biblical perspective, its practice has had place in the Kingdom of God. Polygamy is not just the heritage of Mormons, but of all Bible believing Christians. Indeed, our defense of its practice may be as simple as reciprocating the question.

iv. FURTHER STUDY

Gen. 16:3,4; 30:3-9; Num. 12:5; II Sam. 12:7-12; D&C 132:61-63; *T.G.* (“Marriage, Plural”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Levirate Marriage”); *Mormon Doctrine* (“Plural Marriage”); *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*; “*Women of the Church*” (by Gordon B. Hinkley - Oct ‘96 Gen. Conf.)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 6 **SABBATH DAY / WORD OF WISDOM**

i. QUESTIONS

Why can't you do activities on Sunday? Why can't you go out on Sunday? Why don't you drink alcohol or coffee? Is one glass of beer or wine really going to hurt you? Why can't you have certain food and drink?

ii. BRIEFLY

Sabbath observance is a well known, albeit little practiced, commandment in the Christian community. (See Exodus 20:8). But even if they disagree with our manner, it is only with difficulty that critics argue with our efforts to make Sunday a unique day of the week.

The concept of an eating code is certainly not new among Bible-believing Christians. (See Deut. 14:3-20; Judges 13:13,14). And in our health-conscious society, few will argue the benefits realized from following ours. The human body is a temple of God. The Word of Wisdom is simply our charge to treat it as such. (See 1 Cor. 3:16,17).

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. JUDGMENT: I group these two subjects together because, in a very important way, they are similar. Unlike the law of tithing, for instance, where compliance is very straight forward, these laws require an enormous amount of judgment. So while it's easy to pick up a calculator and determine whether you are paying ten percent of your increase to the Lord, it is much more difficult to determine whether a particular activity is appropriate for Sunday. Sometimes things aren't spelled out in black and white and we have to make judgments. (Remember that the Lord does not command in all things (D&C 58:26)). And though this inexplicitness makes some people very uncomfortable, there is actually a good reason for it. Imagine trying to specify every harmful food item that could possibly be ingested? Or imagine categorizing every possible Sunday activity as acceptable or otherwise. (Remember the Jews defining how many steps could be taken on the Sabbath and which kinds of knots could be tied)? Even if such daunting tasks could be accomplished, what should happen when someone invents a new food item or Sunday activity? Shall we then amend the law? No, rather than spell out the "letter of the law" in this way, how much better it would be to simply understand the "spirit of the law" and then use that understanding in making judgments for ourselves. The "spirit" of The Word of Wisdom is, quite simply, to care for our bodies. While the "spirit" of Sabbath observance is to spend the day in rest and worshipful activities--serving others and serving God. Now with this understanding, come what may, we are prepared. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said it this way:

“Teachers who are commanded to teach ‘the principles of [the] gospel’ and ‘the doctrine of the kingdom’ (D&C 88:77) should generally forgo teaching specific rules or applications. For example, they would not teach any rules for determining what is a full tithing, and they would not provide a list of dos and don'ts for keeping the

Sabbath Day holy. Once a teacher has taught the doctrine and the associated principles from the scriptures and the living prophets, such specific applications or rules are generally the responsibility of individuals and families.

“Well-taught doctrines and principles have a more powerful influence on behavior than rules. When we teach gospel doctrine and principles, we can qualify for the witness and guidance of the Spirit to reinforce our teaching, and we enlist the faith of our students in seeking the guidance of that same Spirit in applying those teachings in their personal lives.” (“Gospel Teaching” by Dallin H. Oaks - Oct. ‘99 Gen. Conf.)

The difficulty with personal judgment is that it varies from individual to individual. And those who are prone to extremism will naturally gravitate to their preferred end of irrationalness. The “conservative” will argue, for instance, that anything containing caffeine, including a cup of hot chocolate, is forbidden while the “liberal” allows anything that isn’t otherwise specified. Of course, both extremes are wrong, and for the same reason. Their focus is on the law rather than the principle. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS OK TO HAVE A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION. When I was young, a couple in my Ward required their children to wear church clothes all day Sunday. Was that right? Of course it was as long as they were not critical of others who felt differently. I’m not suggesting that anything goes as long as it “feels good.” With judgment comes responsibility. Our leaders have given much guidance on this subject and it is within that context that we should make our judgments.

2. POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE: Unfortunately, the focus of both of these commandments tends to be on their negative aspects. The Word of Wisdom, for instance, is much better known for the food items it forbids, than the ones it recommends for good health. Inquiries about them need to be refocused on their positive aspects. I was asked once why a particular Mormon family didn’t let their children come out and play on Sundays. Without knowing the family in question, I conjectured that it may not be a matter of “not letting them play with other children.” “Mormons,” I replied, “engage in many Sunday activities, such as F.H.E. and scripture study, designed to develop family relations. They may be too BUSY to come out and play.” His response was very positive--quite different from his original perception that Mormons were too good to associate with others.

3. UNIQUE DAY: Often a question is the best response to a question. When asked about Sunday activities, simply reverse the question. In other words, Mormon behavior aside, what do Baptists, or Catholics (as the case may be) do to obey this second of the “*Ten Commandments*” (Exodus 20:8-11). The response can be very interesting. They may respond, “We go to church.” Does, then, attendance at Wednesday evening services constitute keeping Wednesday holy? So what is DIFFERENT about Sunday!? The message in this question quickly becomes clear to the inquirer.

4. HEALTH: An eating code is certainly nothing new among God’s people. Orthodox Jews continue to practice the very strict guidelines established in the Law of Moses. With our vast understanding of nutrition and diet, it may be difficult to see what a blessing such a dietary code was to our predecessors who were less enlightened. In this sense, such a law protects us from our own ignorance. Though unknown at the time it was given, the nutritional information provided in The Word of Wisdom, is now commonplace. It has been validated, not only by the discoveries of science and medicine, but by the longevity and health of its adherents. While living in California, I received a health checkup required to change my employment. The doctor, knowing me to be a

recent student, asked where I went to school. When I replied, “BYU,” he asked if I was a Mormon. “Yes.” “Do you live the Mormon eating code?” “Yes.” “That’s good. I just read a study in a medical journal that said Mormons are second only to Seventh-day Adventists in longevity and health.” (Seventh-day Adventists have a similar eating code to our own except that they also abstain from meat).

5. CAFFEINE: Following is a list of common food and drug items with their caffeine content in milligrams: NoDoz (200), Excedrin (130), Percolated Coffee (110), Instant Coffee (66), Mountain Dew (52), Pepsi-Cola (37), Ice Tea (36), 1oz. Dark Chocolate (20), Cocoa (10), 1oz Milk Chocolate (6), Decaffeinated Coffee (2) (“*The Well Pregnancy Book*,” pp 128). With this information, it is easy to see the difficulty in pronouncing one particular item “against” The Word of Wisdom and another otherwise. But a line has to be drawn, and thus far, our church leaders have wisely left it to the individual to draw it. I will say this, however, in order to receive a Temple Recommend, you must respond positively to the question of obedience to this law--and use of caffeinated soft drinks will not prevent you from doing so.

6. “JUST ONE:” Taking “just one drink” or “just one smoke” is a little like taking “just one step” toward a cliff. No, it won’t hurt you. But you must ask yourself why you want to walk in that direction?

7. “NOT BY CONSTRAINT:” In February of 1833, Joseph Smith received the revelation (recorded in the 89th section of the Doctrine and Covenants) known as “*The Word of Wisdom*.” As stated in verse two, it was NOT given as a commandment. In September of 1851 during General Conference, The Word of Wisdom was adopted as a commandment by the “Law of Common Consent.” Joseph F. Smith explained that this delay was to allow the saints time to “overcome” before being brought under the law.

We must remember that the world in general (including Christianity), lives in ignorance of this law. Therefore, we should exercise some restraint in condemning them for not living it. (See 2 Ne. 9:25).

However, even though they may be ignorant of it, Spencer W. Kimball points out that The Word of Wisdom is a commandment for all. (See “*Why call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” Ensign, May 1975, pp 4-7)

iv. FURTHER STUDY

SABBATH DAY - Isa. 58:13,14; Jer. 17:21,22; Rom. 14; Heb. 4:4-11; T.G. (“Sabbath”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Sabbath”); *Mormon Doctrine* (“Sabbath”); *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*; “*The Lord’s Day*” (by James E. Faust - Oct. ‘91 Gen. Conf.); “*The Sabbath Day and Sunday Shopping*” (by Earl C. Tinsel - Apr. ‘96 Gen. Conf.)

WORD OF WISDOM- T.G. (“Word of Wisdom”); *Mormon Doctrine* (“Word of Wisdom”); “*For the Strength of Youth*” pamphlet; *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*; “*The Principle and the Promise*” (by Boyd K. Packer - Apr. ‘96 Gen. Conf.)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 7 **TEMPLES**

i. QUESTIONS

Why are you married in the temple? What are temples for? Why can only Mormons enter the temple? Why do Mormons marry Mormons? Why do Mormons do genealogy? Do you wear sacred underwear?

ii. BRIEFLY

Temples are constructed to house special ordinances. Such ordinances were performed in ancient temples such as those built by Solomon and Herod. These ordinances teach us about God's purposes for man and his place in the eternities from the creation of the world to his final judgment. They teach us of eternal nature of the family and how our most cherished relationships may be perpetuated beyond the grave. Indeed, to this end, Mormons marry each other in the House of the Lord for "time and all eternity" rather than "until death do you part" as is done outside their sacred walls.

Temple worship also teaches and reinforces the principle of proxy atonement wherein Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Indeed, essential ordinances such as baptism are performed by the living in behalf of those who died without the opportunity to embrace the gospel themselves. (See John 3:3-7; 1 Cor. 15:29). Thus, genealogy is vital in temple work fulfilling Malachi's great prophesy that Elijah would be sent "...before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers..." (Mal. 4:5,6).

Just as the Savior had to be a "lamb without blemish" (1 Pet. 1:18,19) to vicariously atone for our sins, so must we be worthy to perform vicarious work for the dead. (Compare Ex. 12:5,6 and 1 Pet. 1:18,19). It is for this reason that Mormons are interviewed by their Bishop (or one of his Counselors) to ensure that those who participate in these sacred ordinances are worthy to do so. There is no presumption here that temple patrons are perfect like Jesus was. However, it is important that His gospel is reflected in their lives. The notion of "worthiness" in religious practice may seem exclusionary to some but its importance in participating in another Christian sacrament, the "Lord's Supper," was emphasized by the Apostle Paul who warned:

"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." (1 Cor. 11:29)

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. BIBLICAL PATTERN: Temple worship has always had place among God's people including the New Testament Christians. I think it is safe to conclude that modern Christians in general don't build temples because they really have no idea what to do with one. Yet, the temple foreseen by Ezekiel, is yet to be built! A little more about Biblical temples...

Tabernacle of the Congregation (Exodus 33:7-11)

- A temple of the Lord. (1 Samuel 1:9)
- Center place of Israel's worship activities until Solomon's Temple was built.
- Pattern, consisting of a Holy of Holies and an inner and outer court, was delivered to Moses by God.
- Completed in the first year after the exodus.

Solomon's Temple (2 Samuel 7:5,6)

- Built after the pattern of the Tabernacle.
- Materials were gathered by David but constructed by Solomon.
- Destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar late in the 5th century B.C.

Temple of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-4)

- A reproduction of the Temple of Solomon.
- Completed about 500 B.C.
- Partially destroyed when Harod took Jerusalem in 37 B.C.

Temple of Herod

- To win popularity with the Jews, Harod proposed to rebuild the Temple of Zerubbabel.
- Completed about 64 A.D.
- Destroyed six years after its completion by the armies of Titus.

Temple foreseen by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-47)

- Detailed description given by Ezekiel suggests a design similar to the Tabernacle.
- Dimensions do not match any known historical temple.
- Yet to be built.

2. DESIGN: The “*Old Testament Student Manual*” (pp. 155) compares ancient and modern temples in this way:

“There are three major divisions or areas in the tabernacle: the outer courtyard; the first room of the tabernacle proper, or holy place; and the inner room, or Holy of Holies. In modern temples three levels of life are also depicted by rooms in the temple, namely, the world, or telestial, room; the terrestrial room; and the celestial room. The significance of these rooms is described thus:

“[The World] room depicts the world in which we live and die. Here instruction is given regarding man’s second estate and the manner in which he may overcome the obstacles of mortality.

‘The terrestrial room is symbolic of the peace that may be attained by men as they overcome their fallen condition through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

‘The celestial room symbolizes the eternal joy and peace found in the presence of God. Something of the spirit of God’s infinite promises to the obedient has been captured in the design of this beautiful room.’”

3. BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD: There is beautiful symbolism in Jesus' declaration to Nicodemus that we must be “*born of water*” (i.e. receive baptism), “*and of the spirit*” (i.e. receive Holy Ghost).

(See John 3:5). Baptism is symbolic of death and resurrection where the dead man is buried only to be raised, in the name of Christ, to immortality. And then the Holy Spirit descends upon him, as it did the disciples on the day of Pentecost, symbolizing reconciliation with God. (See Romans 6:3,4). But what of those who could not receive this necessary ordinance in mortality? In his effort to convince the Corinthians of the reality of the resurrection of the dead, Paul wrote:

“Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:29)

Obviously, Paul was not trying to teach baptism for the dead here. Rather, he used this principle (that the Corinthians were not only apparently familiar with but had, indeed, been practicing) to point out the inconsistency of performing such an ordinance all the while believing that those for whom it is intended would never even rise from the dead. But there IS a resurrection of the dead and so the Corinthians baptisms in their behalf were indeed valid. (One would have to conclude that were it not so, Paul would have taken this opportunity to correct their errant actions rather than using their actions to correct their doctrine).

John 3:5 is very difficult for many Christians to deal with because of its apparent suggestion that “works” (baptism in this case) play a role in salvation. Indeed, there is a rather curious and obviously forced interpretation I have frequently heard from those who reject it as a commandment for baptism. I refer to the suggestion that “born of water” means physical birth from the water-filled womb of a mother. In the first place, why would the Savior make such self-evident statement? In other words, “born” as opposed to what? Secondly, if you argue (as most Christians do) that Adam and Eve are the only human beings not to be born (of a mother), were they then predestined to hell? Such irrationalness ought to suggest the need for a different view. Furthermore, as the wife of a Christian acquaintance of mine pointed out, this interpretation has chilling repercussions for victims of abortion. He writes:

“She commented that if physical birth was a prerequisite for salvation, then all unborn babies must not go to heaven. Now if you believe that life begins at conception, then this is a logical conclusion, and physical birth cannot be a requirement for salvation.”

Her wisdom further accentuates the inanity of concluding that “born of the water” means “physical birth.” It’s only fitting that a women should think of it.

4. GARMENT: There are few religions in the world that don’t make use of some type of clothing with religious significance. Jewish men wear yarmulkes (scull cap), Muslim women wear Burkhas (full body covering), Catholic Nuns wear Habits, and Protestant clergy wear pastoral collars. Mormons do the same with the, not so significant, difference that ours are worn as under-garments. This has the advantage of giving us the appearance of any modestly dressed individual, thus not drawing attention to ourselves or our position. But, as with anything unseen, it becomes a thing of mystery and intrigue to those with little else to worry about.

iv. FURTHER STUDY

“The House of the Lord” (by James E. Talmage); Old Testament Student Manual, chap. 13; T.G

(“Salvation for the Dead”, “Marriage, Interfaith”, “Temple”, “Marriage, Celestial”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Temple”); *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*; “*Temples and Work Therein*” (by David B. Haight - Oct. ‘90 Gen. Conf.)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 8 BLACKS AND THE PRIESTHOOD

i. QUESTIONS

Why were Black persons denied the priesthood? Were Lamanites also denied the priesthood?

ii. BRIEFLY

Mormons do not know why the priesthood was denied certain races of people in the modern OR ancient church. The reasons, simply, have not been revealed. History teaches, nevertheless, that the Lord presents Gospel principles to different peoples under different circumstances. The Levitical Priesthood, for instance, was denied all but the tribe of Levi anciently and the presentation of the gospel to gentile nations was delayed until the House of Israel first received it. Yet it should be noted that from Joseph Smith to Spencer Kimball, church leaders have ALWAYS taught and anticipated the day when the priesthood would be given to ALL men without regard to race. (Certainly, such would not be the case if racism played any role). When the day finally came, it was met with joy from all.

The important point here is this: ALL the blessings of eternity have ALWAYS been within the reach of ALL men. God is just.

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. WHO?: Only descendants of Cain, whose lineage was preserved through the descendants of Ham (“Blacks”) were denied Priesthood blessings in the modern church. (See Abr. 1:21-27). This did NOT affect other people of color including American Indians (“Lamanites” in Book of Mormon vernacular).

2. “ALL MEN:” Under the heading “Blacks and the Priesthood” the *“Encyclopedia of Mormonism”* makes the following statement:

“Some Latter-day Saints theorized that blacks would be restricted throughout mortality. As early as 1852, however, Brigham Young said that the ‘time will come when they will have the privilege of all we have the privilege of and more’ (Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives, Feb. 5, 1852), and increasingly in the 1960s, Presidents of the Church taught that denial of entry to the priesthood was a current commandment of God, but would not prevent blacks from eventually possessing all eternal blessings.”

The revelation extending the priesthood, with all its attending blessings, to all men was received on June 1, 1978 in the Salt Lake Temple. It was received by President Spencer W. Kimball in the presence of the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles.

3. “NOT VALIANT:” It is not, nor has it ever been a doctrine of the LDS church that blacks, or

any other race, were “not valiant” in keeping their first estate (premortal existence).

4. CHRISTIAN RACISM: Since this is often presented as a racial issue, it is interesting to note that the Christian world in general is only now coming to grips with its history of racism. Some notable denominations have, in recent years, officially apologized for their past AND present racism. (See, for example, “*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*,” Section C, Page 8, June 11, 1995). Often our accusers are ignorant of their own history. Joseph Smith said this:

“Elder Hyde inquired the situation of the negro. I replied, they came into the world slaves, mentally and physically. Change their situation with the whites, and they would be like them. They have souls, and are subjects of salvation. Go into Cincinnati or any city, and find an educated negro, who rides in his carriage, and you will see a man who has risen by the powers of his own mind to his exalted state of respectability.” (“*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*,” Page 269)

iv. FURTHER STUDY

Mormon Doctrine (“Negroes”); *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 9 SCRIPTURE

i. QUESTIONS

Why do Mormons add to the Bible? Why do you have your own Bible (Book of Mormon)? Do you believe in the Bible?

ii. BRIEFLY

Most any Latter-day Saint would immediately quote our 8th Article of Faith to demonstrate our belief in the Bible. But the broader question of why we believe in “additional scripture” is, perhaps, best answered by the next one, “*We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.*” This is much more than just a belief, it’s a challenge to all men everywhere that God talks to men. And when those words are written they become scripture. Shall we then reject them because they don’t happen to be bound between the covers of the Bible? Mormons accept The Book of Mormon for exactly the same reason they accept The Bible--because it’s God’s Word.

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. CANONIZATION: The question of why Mormon’s believe in scripture “other than the Bible” is a little like asking a Frenchman why he would want to speak a language other than English. The question itself, suggests a basic lack of understanding (in this case, as to how canonized scripture came to be). Far more interesting is the question of WHY ANYONE WOULD BELIEVE THAT THE BIBLE CONTAINS ALL GOD EVER WANTED MAN TO KNOW. Indeed, this may be the best response we can give.

Bible-based Christian theology is inextricably connected to the assumption that the canonization PROCESS of the Bible is at least as inspired as its content--a subject of considerable debate to be sure. In fact, I would argue that the Bible’s table of contents must be given the same scriptural veracity by the Christian community as the rest of the Bible. Although, at its compilation, there was much agreement concerning what should be included in the Christian canon, the contents of today’s Bible were NOT universally accepted as “scripture, the whole scripture, and nothing but scripture.” Therefore, the importance and influence of documents such as Athanasius’ Easter Letter (that specified the books of the New Testament) cannot be minimized. Indeed, the ability to determine the content of a collection of scripture rivals the ability to author it. And, of course, THE GREAT CEMENTING PROCESS OF ANY RESOLUTION IS THE PASSAGE OF TIME where suggestion becomes truth and ponderings ripen to irrefutable fact.

I think the question Christians (especially those who preach an “inerrant Bible”) MUST not take for granted concerns God’s involvement in the Bible canonization process. It’s easy to conclude that the Bible is exactly as God intended it to be just as it’s easy to conclude that every Bible translation is exactly as it should be. (“How could God let it be otherwise?”) Of course it is much more complicated than that since man and his God-given agency are involved in the equation. My fear is

that the question is too often ignored. It seems so futile to argue the minutia of Biblical verse when the bigger picture of Bible compilation remains unresolved. Those who have truly come to grips with this issue are worthy of great respect and they certainly have mine. A little history.

At the time of Old Testament canonization, there was controversy over the inclusion of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (surprise), and Esther. While at the time of New Testament canonization, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, Hebrews, and (ironically) Revelation were not universally used or accepted in the Christian community.

Additionally, Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews were widely used and accepted by Christians as scripture.

Of course, one cannot forward the notion of an incomplete or imperfect canon without being accused of Biblical heresy. It is, at once, a frustrating and curious thing that is well compared to Judaism's declaration at Jamnia in A.D. 90 that the canon of scripture was complete with the 39 books that would become the Old Testament and that adding to that canon was an act of heresy. Interestingly, there is a markedly similar mentality among many Christians with respect to the Bible where A WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT CONTINUING DIVINE GUIDANCE IS INTERPRETED AS CONTEMPT FOR PAST GUIDANCE. Yet it is both a tragic and arrogant attitude that allows one to proclaim the heavens closed and that God has nothing more to say to men. It may be tempting to counter that it is really any incongruity between modern and ancient scripture that Christians object to. Yet although critically important, congruity is nevertheless a separate issue. No, it is the very IDEA of modern scripture that horrifies many Christians just as it horrified the ancient Jews. And given the turbulent introduction of New Testament revelation, there can be no end to the irony of that fact.

2. BOOK OF MORMON VS. BIBLE: The Book of Mormon is a second witness of Jesus Christ fulfilling the Biblical charge that, “...in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matt. 18:16). It was in this same spirit that eleven different men saw the ancient plates from which The Book of Mormon was translated. Their testimonies are recorded in the front of every copy. And even though most (six) of these men eventually became disaffected with the church, some with animosity toward Joseph Smith and other church leaders (four were excommunicated including all of the Three Witnesses), EACH VIGOROUSLY DEFENDED THIS TESTIMONY TO HIS DYING DAY! This alone would stand in any court of law as a powerful witness of truth.

And, of course, there is the inevitable question, “Don’t you believe The Book of Mormon when it conflicts with the Bible?” This is a little like asking a life-long vegetarian if he has stopped eating meat--the question is born of a false assumption (that significant conflicts exist). You could never adequately respond to such a generalization, so ask for specifics (e.g. What conflicts?). Chances are very good that your request will end the conversation.

3. “ADD TO OR TAKE FROM:” Though I would not normally expect a Bible scholar to do so, Revelation 22:18,19 is often used to discredit extra-Biblical scripture. It is, at once, presumptuous and irrational to suggest that when John wrote these words, he intended them to apply to a book that would not be compiled for another THREE CENTURIES. Pseudepigraphal writings, (i.e. writings of uncertain authorship or authenticity) were a real problem among the Jews. It was not uncommon for authoritative writings to be altered during the process of dissemination to “cleanse” them of

unorthodox or otherwise controversial doctrines. John, who was very aware of this problem, warned such impostors against adding to, or taking from HIS book of prophesy.

This is a very good illustration of the problem Mormons often face when discussing the topic of scripture with other Christians. They (other Christians) will often quote verses from the Bible that use terminology such as “scripture” or “God’s Word” and then, either implicitly or explicitly, apply them to a book (the Bible) that would not exist for centuries, perhaps even millennia, after the passage was written!

(Interestingly there is a similar verse in the Old Testament (Deut. 4:2) which, if interpreted similarly, would render most of the Old Testament, and all of the New Testament as invalid since they were “added to” the canon of scripture after this same warning was given in Deuteronomy.)

4. INTERPRETATION: There are at least three reasons why any two individuals understand the same Bible passage differently--1) one of them errs in his interpretation, 2) they both err in their interpretation, and 3) the Bible's lack of clarity on the subject in question. Most are willing to acknowledge the dangers of interpretation but the very idea that the Bible is somehow inadequate in a given area seems to frighten some people to death--yet it is often the real problem. I sense a danger among such Christians that the Bible has replaced God as their real object of veneration. They can no more believe in an imperfect Bible than an imperfect god.

5. TRANSLATIONS: The English Book of Mormon represents a single translation from an original text. The Bible’s translation and transcription is far more complex as evidenced by the wide variety of versions that exist. (Hence, the proviso “*as far as it is translated correctly*” in our 8th Article of Faith and Joseph Smith’s declaration that The Book of Mormon is, “...*the most correct of any book on earth...*”). Critics often complain that the original Book of Mormon manuscript (Gold Plates) is not to be found, yet OUR OLDEST NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS DATE NO EARLIER THAN 200-300 A.D and most come from the fourth and fifth centuries. Similarly, our oldest Old Testament manuscripts date no earlier than 200-300 B.C. Many disciples of Biblical inerrancy, who naively brush aside translation problems, are surprised to learn that the Catholic Bible contains fifteen additional books widely known as the Apocrypha. So which Bible is inerrant--the Catholic one or one of the many Protestant versions?

And speaking of translations, why use the King James Version? Here are five good reasons:

- It is generally recognized as a good translation.
- The KJV is still the most widely used and accepted translation in the English speaking world. Therefore, the missionary who uses it enjoys a tremendous advantage. It is much easier to teach the gospel from a Bible with which the proselyte is familiar than to introduce a strange version he cannot trust.
- The KJV represents more of a translation and less of an interpretation than other versions. Permit an illustration. While in Norway I bought a Christmas Card to send home. The card read “God Jul” which I translated “Good Christmas.” My companion objected, “You have translated the words” he argued, “rather than their meaning.” “We don’t say ‘Good Christmas’ in English--we say ‘Merry Christmas!’” (And, indeed, he was correct). So while the former represents a “translation,” the latter provides additional “interpretation.” This explains why the KJV is sometimes difficult to

understand because it leaves interpretation to the reader.

- Much of the Biblical text (especially books such as Proverbs and Psalms) was originally written in archaic language because of its inherent poetic quality. Translating such verse as the 23rd Psalm into modern language diminishes its intended poetry.
- Its language is consistent with the other Standard Works of the church (i.e. B of M, P of GP, D&C).

iv. FURTHER STUDY

T.G. (“Scripture”, “Scriptures,...”, “Word of God”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Apocrypha”, “Bible”, “Canon”, “Scripture”, “Pseudepigrapha”, “Song of Solomon”); *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 10 PURPOSE OF LIFE

i. QUESTIONS

What is the purpose of life? Why do bad things happen to good people?

ii. BRIEFLY

Mormons believe that this life is a transition period from a kind of premortal youth to a postmortal adulthood. It is here that we receive our physical bodies and learn to (as it were) live on our own. It is here that we gain experience, learn from our mistakes, and develop faith in our Heavenly Father from whom we are now separated. (See 1 Peter 1:6-8). Just as our Earthly parents reluctantly “cut the apron strings” and sent us into an often cruel and unfair world so that we could mature and grow to be like them, so have our Heavenly Parents sent us here. Though they wanted to protect us, our parents knew that our failures as well as our successes would be for our good. These fleeting moments here are probationary wherein we repent and perfect our lives so that we may be worthy to return to our Father who sent us.

iii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. HAPPINESS: The romantic image of a man climbing to the top of a distant high mountain in order to ask a bearded guru the purpose of life, suggests the importance of this question to humankind. Yet one need look no further than his own home to get many of the answers he seeks. What is your purpose for your own children? Your answer may be as simple as their happiness. Sure, you want them to get an education, marry a worthy spouse, and live in a comfortable home but to what end?--their happiness. And THEIR happiness brings YOU happiness. I think, ultimately, that’s what its all about. EVERYONE JUST WANTS TO BE HAPPY! Indeed, we want to go to heaven because we believe that’s the only way to be happy. I can’t find any reason to believe that our Heavenly Parents want anything different for their own children. (See Eccles. 3:12).

2. WHY?: The question of why God created man is a fascinating one to pursue with those of other religious philosophies. A common Christian answer to why we exist is, simply, to glorify God. And Mormons must agree. Nevertheless, I think that most people who are troubled by questions of their own purpose would be unsatisfied with this answer. Perhaps because it seems so impersonal. Yet traditional Christian theology seems incapable of providing further explanation. Indeed, such an answer creates even more questions. One must conclude that ALL of God’s creations glorify him. Did my creation serve no greater purpose than that of a plant or animal? Why were we created in the way we were and placed in this world we live in? WHY WERE WE NOT CREATED AS SAVED RATHER THAN FALLEN BEINGS? Is this whole human experience some kind of game God is playing with us the conclusion of which is salvation for a preselected few and damnation for the rest?

This is another example of how Mormon theology is so rich with understanding--answering questions that many Christians dare not ask.

3. PERSPECTIVE: A Christian man whom I greatly respect, wrote to me on one occasion, "I see it a travesty of justice that God would send His son to die in our stead..." I responded, "I lament with you here. But realize that justice must be measured from an eternal perspective. Otherwise, the injustice of our world would know no conclusion. Jesus is with His Father partaking in eternal joy. His place in the eternities is just..."

It is easy to judge temporal circumstances or events as unfair. But these must be seen in a greater context. This life, after all, is but a blink of an eye in eternity. As he languished in the Liberty jail, Joseph Smith received the following words of comfort from the Savior:

“And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

“The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?”
(D&C 122:7,8)

iv. FURTHER STUDY

Eccles. 3; 2 Cor. 6:2; Alma 34:32; 42:4; “*The Plan of Salvation - A Flight Plan of Life*” (by Duane B. Gerrard - Oct. ‘97 Gen. Conf.)

LATTER-DAY QUESTIONS FOR LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SECTION 11 **MISCELLANEOUS TOPICS**

i. QUESTIONS

Why do Mormons have large families? I find it difficult starting a conversation about the church. Why is your church called “The Church of Latter-day Saints?” Why can’t your teenagers date until age sixteen? Do you have horns? Why do you fast every first Sunday of the month? What does the bishop do? Why do you go to church in the morning before school?

ii. POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. YOU HAVE HOW MANY KIDS?: Mormon family size is, perhaps, better explained as a cultural rather than a conceived (pardon the pun) phenomenon. The family plays such a central role in Mormon activity and theology that it is bound to be reflected in our culture. We speak, for instance, of bringing Heavenly Father’s spirit children into good LDS homes and becoming “Forever Families.” So this attitude, together with the mother’s health and other social and economic concerns, determine family size.

2. BREAKING THE ICE: I am not a bold outgoing person and so approaching acquaintances about the gospel is a challenge for me. But I have learned a couple of things that make it a whole lot easier.

- There are plenty of innocuous topics (“ice-breakers” if you will) that can ease you into gospel topics--missions, BYU, foreign language ability, scouting, Sunday behavior, great football quarterbacks, seminary, meetinghouses, genealogy, family in Utah, and even tornados in Salt Lake City.

- Never show any discomfort or uneasiness when religious topics come up in normal conversation. Your goal is to get your friends and associates to ASK YOU about the gospel and they’ll never do that if they sense such questions make you uncomfortable. In fact, if they sense an interest on your part, they will be all the more willing to ask. (Better yet, ask them about their own church).

- Do not be afraid of what you might be asked! I emphasize this because we are blessed to embrace a religious philosophy that loves knowledge and understanding. **MORMONISM HAS NOTHING TO HIDE SO DON’T BE AFRAID OF WHAT YOU MIGHT LEARN.**

- When a question does come, do nothing to make the questioner regret he asked. Even the toughest questions deserve an answer.

- It is OK to say, “I don’t know.” No reasonable person expects you to know more about your religion than they know about their own. Tell them that you will research the topic and get back with them. And DO get back with them! If you are in over your head, get help. There are plenty of your LDS acquaintances eager to do so.

3. CHURCH NAME: The Savior declared to the ancient Nephites, “*And how be it my church save it be called in my name?*” (3 Nephi 27:8) Now, by joining this church, we literally take upon us the name of Jesus Christ. Christians in the ancient church were called “Saints.” (See, for example Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:1). The designation “Latter-day” simply distinguishes us from those early Christians.

(By The Way: A “Ward” is a city election district used in early Mormon communities to establish church congregations. “Stake” has reference to stakes that supported the tent that was the tabernacle of Zion. (See Isaiah 33:20; 54:2). Hence, the Kingdom of God is supported by her Stakes.

4. DATING: Church leaders have advised that early teens lack the maturity to begin relationships with the opposite sex. Each teen matures at a different rate, of course, but age sixteen is generally suggested as a good starting point. Such common-sense counsel is not limited to Mormons, as parents from all walks of life similarly limit the dating of their teens.

5. HORNS: I usually answer such inquiries with a matter-of-fact, “Yes.” (I reason that there is little sincerity in such questions and so I’m inclined to answer likewise).

6. “FAST SUNDAY:” The Mormon Fast Sunday is a realization of the Lord’s entreaty,

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? IS IT NOT TO DEAL THY BREAD TO THE HUNGRY, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” (Isaiah 58:6-7). (Upper-case added).

Money that would have been used to feed the prosperous, rather is given to assist the needy. The giver reaps the spiritual and physical benefits of a fast while the receiver’s temporal needs are met. It is truly a win/win scenario. (When Mormons raised nine-million dollars, on a special fast day, to relieve famine in Ethiopia, then President Ronald Reagan was so impressed, he wanted to institute a national day of fasting).

7. BISHOP: A Bishop is the Pastor of a Mormon congregation. He, together with his two assistants (“Counselors”), constitute the “Bishopric.” Like the Pastor or congregational clergy of any religion, a Bishop is the spiritual and temporal leader of a congregation of believers. Unlike most clergy, he is a lay minister (not paid). Not only does this mean that a Mormon Bishop divides his time between the clergy and a full-time career but also that he did not seek his position but rather accepted, with much trepidation and fear, this call to serve the Lord. A bishop generally serves for about five years before another is called to serve in his place.

8. SEMINARY: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a lay ministry. Therefore, church education programs such as seminary are intended for everyone rather than just those who are seeking position within the church. The purpose of seminary is to prepare high school age youth to serve missions and to, generally, know their religion. Before school is an effective time to begin as the only competing activity seems to be sleep.

iv. FURTHER STUDY

CHURCH NAME - *T.G.* (“Church, Name Of”); “*Mormon Should Mean ‘More Good’*” (by Gordon B. Hinkley - Oct. ‘90 Gen Conf.)

DATING - “*For the Strength of Youth*” pamphlet

“FAST SUNDAY” - *T.G.* (“Fast, Fasting”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Fasts”)

BISHOP - *T.G.* (“Bishop”); *Bible Dictionary* (“Bishop”)