

# Is Mormonism Christian?

By Cal Fullerton

On December 23, 2007, **Joel Osteen**, pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, the largest church in the U.S., **was asked by Fox News if he believes a Mormon is a true Christian. He said, "Well, in my mind they are."**<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Joel didn't approve of everything the Mormon Church teaches--but why did he say Mormons are Christians? Was he on the edge of a new revelation the body of Christ needs to hear? Or is he uninformed, or theologically naive?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, claims more than 13 million members worldwide, and after flourishing for nearly 180 years, still grows at a brisk pace.

Are they a threat to society, as many Christians believe? Are they enemies of the kingdom of God? Many tell you to stay away from them unless your purpose is to lead them to the true Christ.

**Mormonism does indeed promote many false beliefs.** We should pray for them and, by God's grace, help them to see more light. Of course, while we do that we always want to be careful that we aren't drawn into accepting their faulty doctrines.

**However, my wife and I have met many Mormons who were born-again even though they believed everything their denomination wanted them to believe!** Most of the LDS missionaries we have met--missionaries are official representatives of the Church--clearly had a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

During prayerful research in the late 1980s, I discovered that **when non-Mormon Christians write about Mormonism they usually present an overall distortion of Mormonism as a whole.** Like much of the secular media, they deceive us primarily by what they *don't* tell us.

They don't tell us that roughly seventy-five percent of LDS teachings

agree with evangelical teachings. More importantly, they don't tell us that **the LDS is founded on the essential biblical doctrines for salvation**. The Articles of Faith of the Mormon Church states that Jesus is the Son of God, and that salvation was made possible by Jesus' sacrifice. It also encourages repentance, faith in Christ, and reception of the Holy Spirit. This makes it a Christian organization--not *the* Christian organization as they claim, but one among many.

### God was a Mortal Man?

But what about all their false beliefs? Let's look at one of the falsehoods that gets them into trouble with evangelicals.

**Mormons believe God was once a man like us and became God.** This sounds like a blatant disregard for the Bible and a gross abasement of God. However, if we look at this within the context of the entire spectrum of Latter-day Saint theology, and we become acquainted with the people who believe it, we find this error much less a cause for concern than at first glance.

First, their idea that God was once a mortal man is off in the background on a dusty obscure shelf. The LDS doesn't emphasize it. They focus much more on such things as loving your neighbor by the indwelling power of Jesus' Spirit.

Secondly, in all fairness to them, we'll want to note that **they actually have a very high regard for God. They know him as the Creator, Ruler, Preserver and Judge of all things.** They believe he has all power, knows all things, is perfectly holy, and deserves to be served by all. And they believe he can be approached and served only through the perfect redemption provided by Jesus' death on a cross for their sins.

Thirdly--and here's the clincher--**the Bible doesn't actually say that in order to be saved you have to believe God has always been immortal.** It simply says, "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6 NIV). It simply says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9 NIV).

James S. Stewart, once chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen in Scotland, correctly asserted, "It never was Christ's way to demand a full-fledged

faith for a beginning. It never was his way to hold men back from discipleship on the ground of an incomplete creed.”<sup>2</sup>

Once basic faith has begun, the blood of Christ covers unintentional error. It's not that error doesn't matter. Falsehoods are always harmful. They prohibit complete conformity to the image of Christ and prevent us from experiencing all of God's blessings. But where our eternal destiny is concerned, where it's a question of whether we're on the way to heaven or hell, unintentional error that doesn't touch a doctrine which is essential for salvation is covered by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the death of Christ doesn't cover sins, we're all in trouble!

"Yes," someone might say, "but it's hard to imagine how Mormons can say that God was once a man like us and not know it is unbiblical." But if we lived in their environment for a while, which is remarkably isolated from evangelical fellowship, we could see that they really are under Satan's delusion. Their intentions are good. They sincerely believe there is a Bible verse that supports this view!

Where? Try not to laugh or roll your eyes in ridicule when I tell you. It's John 5:19 (NIV): "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing. . . ." Their reasoning is that since Jesus was a mortal man, he must have seen that the Father was once a mortal man!

The point I'm making is that Mormons are sincerely deceived, not deliberately blaspheming God.

### Fruit

Many non-Mormons think Mormons are wolves in sheep's clothing. Jesus warned us about wolves, then said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16, NIV). If LDS people are wolves in disguise, bad fruit such as selfishness, jealousy, anger or drunkenness will tend to characterize them (Galatians 5:16-21 NIV). But most evangelicals acknowledge that they make good neighbors.

Something doesn't add up. Either Jesus was wrong, and fruit inspection is not a reliable guide, or their good fruit is yet another clue that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Christian at its foundation.

The printed Word of God plainly tells us what is essential for salvation and what is not. And the Holy Spirit beckons us to use his discernment.

Those who let the Lord awaken them will be blessed proportionately!

1. "Transcript: Pastor Joel Osteen on 'FNS'," December 23, 2007. *FoxNews.com* (accessed December 26, 2007).
2. James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (n.p., Westminster Knox, 1995), 66-67.

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