

**Some Theological Differences between Evangelical Christianity
and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism)**

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

Scripture

Evangelical Christianity: Only the Bible is inspired Scripture.

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds." (Hebrews 1:1-2)

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:19-21)

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

LDS: There are four standard works: The Bible (as far as it is translated correctly), the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*.

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." (Joseph Smith, Article 8 of *The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*)

"By the *standard works* of the Church is meant the following four volumes of scripture: The Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. The Church uses the King James Version of the Bible, but acceptance of the Bible is coupled with a reservation that it is true only insofar as translated correctly. ... These four volumes of scripture are the standards, the measuring rods, the gauges by which all things are judged." (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), s.v., "Scripture," p. 764, emphasis in original)

"The Bible is the Word of God, written by men. It is a basic Mormon teaching. But the Latter-day Saints recognize that errors have crept into this sacred work because of the manner in which the book has come to us. Moreover, they regard it as not being complete as a guide. Scores of different types of interpretations on basic doctrines, which have led to the creation of hundreds of different sects, bear witness to the inadequacy of the Bible. ... Supplementing the Bible, the Latter-day Saints have three other books. These with the Bible constitute the standard works of the Church. They are known as the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price." (Gordon B. Hinckley, *What of the Mormons?* (n.c.: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 10, 12.)

God

Number of Gods

Evangelical Christianity: There is only one God. This does not mean merely that there is only one God with whom we have to do, but rather that there is only one Supreme Being in existence.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4)

"Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me." (Isaiah 46:9)

LDS: There are many Gods.

"And they (the Gods) said 'Let there be light' and there was light." (*Pearl of Great Price*, "Book of Abraham" 4:3)

"According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was ..." (*Doctrine & Covenants* 121:32)

"Three separate personages—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a *plurality of Gods* exists. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only Gods we worship. But in addition there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods." (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v. "Plurality of Gods," p. 577, emphasis in original)

"If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that he had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son?" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 374, as cited in McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v. "Plurality of Gods," p. 577)

Trinity of God

Evangelical Christianity: There is only one eternal God who exists in three co-equal and co-eternal persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all." (1

LDS: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three separate and distinct Gods.

"Three glorified, exalted, and perfected personages comprise the *Godhead* or supreme presidency of the universe. ... They are: God the Father; God the Son; God the Holy Ghost. ... Though each God in the Godhead is a personage, separate and distinct from each of the others, yet they are 'one God' ... meaning that they are united as one in the attributes of perfection. ... they are three separate and distinct entities. Each occupies space and is and

<p>Corinthians 12:4-6)</p> <p>"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit <i>be</i> with you all. Amen." (2 Corinthians 13:14)</p> <p>"elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." (1 Peter 1:2)</p>	<p>can be in but one place at one time ..." (McConkie, <i>Mormon Doctrine</i>, s.v. "Godhead," p. 319, emphasis in original)</p> <p>"Three separate personages—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, ..." (McConkie, <i>Mormon Doctrine</i>, s.v. "Plurality of Gods," p. 577)</p>
<p>Substance of God</p>	
<p>Evangelical Christianity: God is a spirit, without flesh and bone.</p> <p>"God <i>is</i> Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24)</p> <p>"Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (Luke 24:39)</p>	<p>LDS: God is a physical personage of flesh and bone.</p> <p>"The Father has a body of flesh, and bones as tangible as man's." (<i>Doctrine & Covenants</i> 130:22)</p> <p>"Therefore we know that both the Father and the Son are in form and stature perfect men; each of them possesses a tangible body, infinitely pure and perfect and attended by transcendent glory, nevertheless a body of flesh and bones." (James E. Talmage, <i>A Study of the Articles of Faith</i> (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1971), 42)</p> <p>"We affirm that to deny the materiality of God's person is to deny God; for ... and immaterial body cannot exist." (Talmage, <i>A Study of the Articles of Faith</i>, 48)</p>
<p>History of God</p>	
<p>Evangelical Christianity: God has always been God.</p> <p>"Even from everlasting to everlasting, You <i>are</i> God." (Psalm 90:2)</p> <p>"And understand that I <i>am</i> He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me." (Isaiah 43:10)</p>	<p>LDS: God was once a mere man.</p> <p>"God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! ... I am going to tell you how God came to be God. Ye have imagined and suppose that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea ... he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did." (<i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i>, p. 345-347, as cited in McConkie, <i>Mormon Doctrine</i>, s.v. "Godhood," p. 321)</p>

Essence of God

Evangelical Christianity: God is not a man.

"God *is* not a man." (Numbers 23:19)

LDS: God is an exalted man.

"God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 345-347, as cited in McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v., "Godhood," p. 321)

Jesus Christ

Evangelical Christianity: Jesus is God in the Flesh and is one in essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God." (Philippians 2:5-6)

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell." (Col. 1:15-19)

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9)

LDS: Jesus is the offspring of Elohim and one of his wives and is the brother of the Devil.

"Implicit in the Christian verity that all men are the spirit children of an *Eternal Father* is the usually unspoken truth that they are also the offspring of an *Eternal Mother*. ... This doctrine that there is a *Mother in Heaven* was affirmed in plainness by the First Presidency of the Church ... they said that 'man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of *heavenly parents* ...' (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v., "Mother in Heaven," p. 516, emphasis in original)

"Among the spirit children of Elohim the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors. ... There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of human kind. ... He is the The Son, as they are sons and daughters of Elohim." (Talmadge, *Articles*, pp. 472, 473)

"Since all men are the personal spirit children of the Father, and since Christ was the Firstborn spirit offspring, it follows that he is the Elder Brother of all men." (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v. "Elder Brother," p. 214)

"The *devil* (literally meaning *slanderer*) is a spirit son of God who was born in the morning of pre-existence." (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v. "Devil," p. 192, emphasis in original)

"SON OF THE MORNING. ... This name-title of Satan indicates he was one of the early born spirit children of the Father." (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v. "Son of the Morning," p. 744)

Salvation

Definition of Salvation

Evangelical Christianity: Salvation is gaining eternal life whereby we are enabled to be with God forever in heaven. Becoming "like Him" (1 John 3:2) means that we will be made completely holy and righteous as He is.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also." (John 14:2-3)

"As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:3-4)

LDS: Salvation is distinguished from exaltation to Godhood. Salvation, in the sense of the general resurrection, will come to all mankind. Exaltation to Godhood comes only who earn it and requires faith in the Mormon Christ, baptism, obedience to the teaching of the Mormon Church.

"Some degree of salvation will come to all who have not forfeited their right to it; exaltation is given to those only who by righteous effort have won a claim to God's merciful liberality by which it is bestowed." (Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, 91)

"*Unconditional or general salvation*, that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law, consists in the mere fact of being resurrected. In this sense salvation is synonymous with immortality ... *This kind of salvation eventually will come to all mankind, excepting only the sons of perdition.* (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v., "Salvation," p. 669, emphasis in original)

"Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have go to learn how to be gods yourselves ... the same as all gods have done before you ... from exaltation to exaltation ... until you arrive at the station of a god." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 345-347, as cited in McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, s.v., "Godhood," p. 321)

Means of Salvation

Evangelical Christianity: Salvation is by God's grace through faith. It is a gift and cannot be earned by works. All that is necessary is belief in the gospel. Salvation is possible because God the Father punished our sins in Jesus Christ on the cross in our place. To him who believes, God imputes His own righteousness. This righteousness is what enables us to live with God forever in Heaven.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should

LDS: Works are necessary for ultimate salvation.

"We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel." (Joseph Smith, Article 3 of *The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*)

"One of the most fallacious doctrines originated by Satan and propounded by man is that man is saved alone by the grace of God; that belief in Jesus Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation. ...

not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Romans 4:4-5)

"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24)

"For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:24-26)

"but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)

[This passage] makes clear the two facets, neither of which alone would bring the individual salvation—the grace of Christ, particularly as represented by his atoning sacrifice, and individual effort." (Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 206, 207.)

"The individual effect of the Atonement makes it possible for any and every soul to obtain absolution from the effect of personal sins, through the mediation of Christ; but such saving intercession is to be invoked by individual effort as manifested through faith, repentance, and continued works of righteousness." (Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith*, 89)

"Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism. And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, ... he shall have eternal life ..." (Alma 7:15, 16, *The Book of Mormon*, p. 212.)