

Finding *the* Way

Separating Mormon Myth from Gospel Reality

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My Prayer

Father, as I put these thoughts to paper, please help me to emulate and demonstrate Your love. I do not believe for a second that you have ever abandoned me or left me completely without Your help. The things that I write have been on my heart over the last several years and I believe come from you Father. Please help me to convey these thoughts to my brothers and sisters, not so that they will fall away, but so that they will be drawn closer to Your presence and Your love, so that they will know truth through You, both intellectually and spiritually, so that they will find true meaning in their lives and the purpose for which they are here. Please let this writing be a tool in Your hands to bring many unto You. I pray this in the name of Your beloved son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I, the author, have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at publishing time, and to ensure that every citation was correct and provided the current information. The information in this book is entirely comprised of my opinions based on the information I have. There is no legal advice here. There are those who may disagree or come to a different interpretation of the facts. I have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of all information presented. However, I do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

Hey, I'm a lawyer, there has to be a disclaimer somewhere.

Preface

Maybe you have been going through the motions at Church, attending your meetings, performing your callings, but you feel like you are missing out on something. Maybe you just read the viral “CES Letter” on the internet. Maybe you have researched the history of the Church and you can no longer reconcile what you learned growing up with what you now know.

Now you do not know what to do and you feel stuck. There are times in your life where you were certain that you felt God’s presence. You’ve been clinging on to those moments, but now you are at a crossroad. Do you throw it all away? Do you move on to something completely different?

That is what this book is for.

I felt as though God called me to write this book to help separate fact from fiction. I do not think you can reconcile much of what you were taught; however, not everything you have learned is fiction.

I believe in Jesus Christ. I truly do. Not because someone “lit my candle” or because I bore my testimony enough times to convince myself. I have faith because the evidence is sound. I have faith because I have researched convincing evidences, evidences that I believe prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose from the dead. However, separating the fact from the fiction of much of what I grew up with was difficult. I wrote this book to share my journey, to correct a lot of the misunderstandings that are common growing up in the LDS Church, to help separate fact from fiction, and to hopefully clear the path that leads to Christ.

Truly, he is the *way*, the truth, and the life.

Introduction

What I am writing is not easy to discuss. In fact, it is extraordinarily difficult; however, I believe the Lord has put it on my heart to put these thoughts into writing so that they may be an instrument in assisting His children back into His presence.

I grew up Mormon.

I hope to use that term in a non-offensive way. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has gone back and forth over the years on whether that term is satisfactory to describe its members or its church, (apparently now LDS may not even be acceptable) but I will colloquially refer to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as either “the Church” or the “Mormon Church” throughout this book.

I grew up as a Mormon in a Mormon household. My mother was my seminary teacher and my father, for part of his life, was the bishop of our ward. For the first 36 or so years of my life I was an active member of the Church. I went to Church every Sunday, even for all three hours. Yes, I know it is less now. I even attended when I lived in Utah and church did not start until 2:30pm, so in the winter we would not get out until after the sun had set.

I hated that.

I maintained a current temple recommend, although I probably did not go as often as I was instructed, and I continually felt a little guilty about that. I served a mission for the church in California. I served in the Church and performed my callings, though sometimes I did not necessarily “magnify” them as much as I could have. I suspect I was like many in the Mormon Church: busy but still trying to do what I felt the

Church wanted of me. Therefore, I was trying to do what God wanted of me, because growing up Mormon, God and Church were basically synonymous.

I married in the temple and had children. It was a beautiful wedding to a beautiful woman. I went to law school, graduated in the top 10% of my class, and was blessed with a decent job despite graduating in the middle of the “great recession.” Life should have been good, right?

However, over the last several years of my time in the Mormon Church, in my early to mid-thirties, a few years after graduating from law school, I felt a longing for something more. To me, church-related things were largely spiritual drudgery. It was not that I hated church-related activities or even going to church, I just wanted something more spiritually fulfilling; I was not *feeling* spiritually satisfied most of the time. I felt a gaping hole in my heart, and although I would watch hours of general conference, attend church, go to the temple, attend my auxiliary meetings, and perform my callings, the void was still there. I was not satisfied. I knew I was not the only one feeling that way, as I heard of people leaving the Church, but I didn’t think too much about that; I just felt they really weren’t that committed in the first place. Perhaps there were sins they wanted to commit; perhaps they wanted alcohol, sex, drugs, or something else outside of the Church. Perhaps they felt that their political ideology did not align with the “Christian values” of the Church, and they felt that their political affiliations were more important than their eternal salvation.

I did not care too much.

I planned to “endure to the end.”

Unfortunately, “endurance” is really what it felt like. I did not feel I needed to leave the Church necessarily, but I was

not necessarily *enjoying* the journey either. It was during this time that more history of the Church became readily available. Articles were published and information was revealed. The Joseph Smith Papers were introducing a part of the Church's history that had not been widely available (though such availability had been growing due to the internet). I remember seeing a picture of a seer stone, published by the Church, which was something relatively new to me. This started an uproar on social media. I recall several ex-Mormons mocking the Church and Joseph Smith on social media, showing a painting of Joseph Smith with his face buried in his hat while translating the Book of Mormon. I jumped into their dialogue to defend the Church.

However, people *were* leaving the Church. An ex-girlfriend I knew left. A close friend left. I never really asked them why because, perhaps, I did not *really* want to know.

But the feeling that people were leaving in droves was nearly palpable.¹ I recall attending a meeting with the Elder's Quorum presidency, where our president encouraged us to stay with the Church. He had heard of people leaving after they read about the Church's history and/or read things in the Joseph Smith Papers. He encouraged us to remain faithful to the restored Gospel. I had general authorities telling me to "stay in the boat" and that they had all the truth, to trust in them

¹ The Church will deny loss in membership, and instead point to the fact that missionary efforts are still increasing the actual membership on the Church rosters. However, after leaving the Church, in my experience, most ex-Mormons do not expend the effort to actually have their names removed from the Church records. I would suspect that the activity rates have gone down, whereas the Church roster may still continue to grow due to this effect. Again, this is a personal impression based upon my own experience and personally seeing many friends leave the church over the last several years.

and to just keep trudging along; however, I couldn't shake the feeling that, just maybe, there was something more out there.

I would repress these thoughts and think that I wasn't like those *heathens* who were just going to shake off everything they grew up with. I was not ready to, nor was I ever planning to leave the Mormon faith, because I believed it and, frankly, I identified with it.

Not only did I believe it held the keys to eternal salvation and happiness, but it was part of who I was. It was a huge part of my *identity*.

Virtually all my friends were Mormon; many of my colleagues were Mormon, and I felt I was respected, at least in part, *because* I was Mormon. I couldn't just throw that all away! If I left, which I wasn't going to do, not only would I be risking eternal salvation, but I would lose my friends, my community, and my safety net. This safety net was something that I kept in the back of my mind, even as my doubts grew; the Church welfare programs and other institutions available to Mormons are fantastic.

Additionally, even though I had never had a specific "yes" answer to my prayers about the Book of Mormon, and even though I had some concerns about Joseph Smith and the early Church, I felt that there really weren't any other options out there as far as truth. Even though the Church might have a few skeletons in its closet or other things that I didn't understand, I had heard about all of the abominable things the Catholic Church did back in the day, so I knew that it couldn't be "the true church." Further, I thought that most other churches were just break-offs from the Catholic Church, and those "non-denominational" churches were relying on skinny jeans and trendy coffee to "sell Jesus." So, for a while, I started looking into other books, websites, and organizations

associated with Mormonism itself, though not officially advocated for or endorsed by the official Church. I was dipping my foot into a deeper part of the pool rather than getting out of the pool.

Still, none of it felt right.

I briefly looked at the “Community of Christ” and the Strangites (I will discuss these in greater detail later if these are unfamiliar to you) who believed in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon and were early breakoffs of the Church. I did not give them too much thought, however; they were so small and odd that they just *couldn't* be true, I thought. If God were going to reveal his truth, it would have to at least catch on with more than just a few people.

So yes, I was looking into things that still had Mormon origins, but perhaps offered a little bit more. Maybe there was something else that I could *add to* Mormonism in order to feel fulfilled, in order to feel I was on the path God wanted me to be on. I started looking into *recent* breakoffs from the Mormon Church who, like Joseph Smith, claimed to have seen Jesus Christ in person. Some of the things they said rang true, while other things they said just sounded bizarre to me. The more I researched many of these breakoffs, studied their beliefs, and read their blogs, the sadder I felt for many of these people. They were looking for truth, but they were not finding it. They could not shake off Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon, so they were desperately holding on to those parts of the Church and trying to come up with something else to fill in the rest. Their lives became perpetual conspiracy theories with no apparent spiritual progression.

For a while I continued down this same route. However, none of it satisfied; none of it drew me closer to God.

So, in the meantime, I continued the typical Mormon life.

When my daughter turned five years old and I would drive her to school in the mornings, I found public radio to be quite terrifying. Even on the most benign stations, there was always something sexual, something controversial, or just something that I didn't want my child to hear. I started listening to Christian radio simply to avoid having to have awkward conversations with my daughter later on. Eventually, I grew to *actually like* the music on Christian radio. I didn't care much for the DJs, who reminded me of awkward grandparents or weird aunts and uncles laughing at their own terrible jokes, but the music itself tended to have a good message, and I knew it was something safe that I wouldn't have to explain to my child later.

One day while driving, (and all the while still investigating pseudo-Mormon things and beginning to question the Church as a whole) I heard a song by an artist named Jason Gray. The song was called "More Like Falling in Love." The song struck me more than any song had ever struck me. It rang true to me. I still remember getting home one evening, (yes, I actually began to like Christian music and would even listen to it when my daughter wasn't in the car) feeling awestruck over the relevancy of the song in my life. The line that particularly struck me was: "all religion ever made of me was a sinner with a stone tied to my feet."

That was me.

I was still a sinner; I had not grown spiritually in decades, though I would go through the rituals and checklists of the Church. I usually would not commit the "bigger" sins because I was afraid of the consequences. I might have to talk to the Bishop. I might lose my temple recommend. If I did X,

Y, or Z, I might not be able to take the sacrament, and everyone is going to notice *that* when I am sitting in church. I did not need to be part of the Mormon gossip train. I was avoiding some of the sins because I did not want to get in trouble, but a big part of me still wanted to do them. If there were not those damned consequences, I probably *would* do them.

You see, the song discusses the rigid rules and guidelines that he had been handed down by spiritual leaders, *i.e.* “the law.” They were not bad rules, indeed, they were good rules. However, the *rules themselves* did not change his heart. Although he might not *actually* commit some of the sins, the rules represented a spiritual chain around his leg rather than a *desire* of his heart.

I felt the same way.

I have known forever that I am quite imperfect. I have many, many spiritual struggles and weaknesses and am often still fumbling through life. Although, according to the Church, I did most of the things I was supposed to do, was on the “straight and narrow,” and was following the Mormon checklist, I still had wrong desires. I lusted at times; more often than I would like to admit. I was easily angered. I felt less-than motivated at many of the things asked of me. I felt spiritually apathetic most of the time.

However, the song goes on, he describes that *through Christ* his heart was changing. Although I initially found it quite irritating and even a little disturbing when I heard Christian radio DJs and others discuss “falling in love with Jesus Christ,” for the first time, it *actually* made sense. Jason Gray described that after “falling in love” with Christ, his heart was changed. No longer was there a need for the rigid shackles of rules because he no longer *desired* to commit those sins. Christ was someone he truly loved, and he wanted to obey

because of that love. He had given those sins to Christ, and his heart had changed. Sitting in the car, I felt just like him. I was human, a failure, and not spiritually on the path I was supposed to go, but I felt that maybe, just maybe, Christ *himself* was the answer.

So, what did I do?

Well, I was not ready to make any big jump. I continued searching for things outside of “mainstream” Mormonism, but still within its universe. Like many, I clung to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. I didn’t really start studying the Bible, because, well, Mormons have the Bible and all Mormons know that it has been handed down for thousands of years and most certainly has errors due to human handling, copying, and translating along with those supposed “nefarious monks” who altered the texts for their own purposes. Thus, I felt, there must be better resources out there.

Again, that may sound weird to a non-Mormon, but you grow up relying on the fact that the Bible may be true, but only “as far as it is translated correctly.”² So really, it couldn’t be relied upon as a stand-alone resource; so I kept looking. I kept listening to Christian radio as well and continued to hear songs that I not only liked spiritually, but aesthetically as well, songs that I would want to sing out loud in the car while I was driving. I was not making any major spiritual changes, however, until one day I came across an article that discussed the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. I learned that, although Joseph Smith and the Mormon Church claimed this book to be a translation of an ancient Egyptian papyri, it was nothing of the sort and the papyri, *which was still in the possession of the Church*, was nothing like Joseph Smith claimed it to be. It had nothing to do with Abraham, human

² Eighth Article of Faith.

sacrifice, or literally *anything* that Joseph Smith claimed it was. I will discuss this in greater detail later, but for the moment, suffice it to say, this added significantly to my doubts.

I tried to shrug this off, and just ignore it, just trying to “have faith” in my childhood and leaders, but more things kept creeping up. I learned about Brigham Young’s bizarre teachings that Jesus Christ’s atonement was not enough for all sins, that he taught some people needed to have their “blood spilled” so they could be forgiven. I learned about errors in the King James Bible that mysteriously showed up in the Book of Mormon.

This was just the start.

Eventually, over a period of time, I knew I had to leave the Church. I will never forget those conversations with my loved ones. Even though, they acknowledged, some things may seem awry, some encouraged me still to cling to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Even if Brigham Young had done some wonky things in the past, the very foundations of Mormonism, the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith, were still true. However, if law school and years practicing as a lawyer taught me one thing, it was how to weigh evidence. In desperation to still hold onto the Church, I researched the Church’s official statements attempting to clarify murky Church history. I compared the statements of the original founders, and I weighed the evidence. I disregarded the statements of those who were clearly biased and angry with the Church. However, even attempting to push the scales in support of the Church, I couldn’t ignore the facts before me. The evidence was not and is not there. I still believed in Christ, but that was really all I even was *remotely* confident in, and even that was a little shaky at that point. In all honesty, I’m not sure why I didn’t just abandon Christ at that time... now

writing this book, I feel as though, perhaps, he was still clinging on to me.

My wife was (and is) extraordinarily loving and understanding, but initially she still wanted to hang on to the Church. Although I had shared with her many of my concerns since this entire journey had started, the Church was also part of *her* identity. Her friends were Mormon. We lived in a part of the city that I used to refer to as “Little Provo” due to the abundance of Mormon families living in the area. All of our babysitters were Mormon; we would never be able to go out on a date, and even if we could, who would go with us? As a couple, we did not have *any* non-Mormon couples that we were friends with.

I realized leaving the Church would be harder on my wife than it would be on me.

She was social; I was not. She had a ton of friends; I had a couple. I had more colleagues than her because she was a stay-at-home mother, but she had a lot more friends and people who would be disappointed in her. Her family was all Mormon except for her older sister who had left years earlier. By the time I was finally ready to leave, my family was partially in, partially out, and virtually all doubting at least significant aspects of the Mormon Church at this time, so it would be an easier transition for me. But we both had so many doubts and were afraid of the unknown. We have four beautiful children, and the thought of them going out into the world without the foundation of the Church was terrifying. One lesson that the Church beats into its members is significance of the sin of sex outside of marriage. In the Mormon Church, having sex outside of marriage is next to murder on the sin hierarchy. Would leaving the Church result in my kids running amok and sleeping around, and thus ruining their lives? What would they do for college? Brigham Young

University is extraordinarily sober, and we wanted *that* for our kids.

Further, even if we did leave the Church, I wanted more. I wanted more spiritual fulfillment. I wanted more truth. I wanted more *evidence*, more real evidence, that what I was going to follow would be true. I realized that I had grown up with a lot of half-truths; I was not going to fall for that again. I needed to do my research.

As you probably guessed, we did leave the Church, but so much more than just that. This is just the beginning; we will get to the rest in a bit.

I want to walk you through my journey as I suspect many of you are on the same road.

Purpose

The purpose of this book is to help direct the reader to truth—The Truth. In my experience with many of my ex-Mormon friends, who I am sad to say are largely atheists, agnostic, or in limbo regarding their faith, is that once you leave the Mormon Church you feel jilted and confused. They left Mormonism because they were told all of these fantastic narratives their entire lives and now they have lost a lot of trust in *any* organized religion. For many, they wonder if *any* of the stories they were told are true or whether anyone can even know truth.

But I suspect, if you are reading this book, it is because you still believe there is truth out there. I suspect you also feel something missing in your life. Maybe you left the Church years ago or maybe you are still in it physically but no longer emotionally or spiritually. Maybe you are still in the Church, but with serious doubts and concerns and just don't know what to do. Maybe you are, like I was for a long time, clinging to

parts of Mormonism and disregarding or questioning many other parts, while still looking for something that is missing. Maybe you feel a hole in your soul that the Church is not satisfying. There is a thirst, but no drink offered by the Church has satisfied it.

If any of these scenarios fit your life, then I beg you, please read on. This book is to help clear up the confusion and help you make the most important decision you will ever make.

Once the well of Mormonism has dried up, you are stuck. You are in a holding pattern, and you do not know where to go. Believe it or not, this can be a good thing, a *really* good thing. On the other hand, it can also be extraordinarily terrible, and the choice you make at this point will affect everything, and I mean *everything*. I hope and pray that this book helps you make the most of this and that you make the right decision.

The Hole

The following may seem a little out of place. However, at this point in your journey, you may be wondering why to even look any further. You may be considering just abandoning everything religious and living the life that perhaps the worldly side of you has always wanted to live.

We are not made for that.

We are created for something more.

We are created for God.

We live in an age where there is endless noise around us, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We are constantly being hassled by our smart phones, addictively checking our social media posts, and leaving on the television just to continue the “background noise.” It is rare that we actually experience a

moment of true silence and reflection (especially when you have kids). I suspect those on their deathbeds experience only silence and reflection and this is when they often recognize that they have wasted so much of their lives on things that did not matter.

When I would recognize this hole, I would want to fill it.

However, as indicated earlier, Mormonism was not filling it for me. I still felt empty. The words of the Mormon “prophets” might throw a thin sheet over the hole for a little while, and I would mentally try to convince myself that everything was fine; but the hole was still there. Like many, I suppose, I would put on some background noise, distract myself by binge watching some television show online, and do anything I could to avoid the fact that there was a gaping hole inside of me. I believe many people turn to alcohol, drugs, excessive eating, pornography, unhealthy relationships, or any other activity that will give a “high” or distraction in order to temporarily ignore the hole. I am guilty of many of these as well. However, as we know, all of these actions inevitably end up with consequences we regret. Deep down we know something is missing, but we do not know how to find it or fill it and, well, it hurts.

It really hurts.

Others, I believe, take an opposite approach. They ignore the hole entirely, devote themselves to an attitude of strict obedience to a religion or ideology (including atheism or self-worship), and do everything they can to convince themselves that the hole is not there. While hiding their own insecurities, they look down on and even mock others who are not following their chosen prescription for life. They convince themselves that they have the truth, and that anyone who does

not agree with them is a fool. This is not any more helpful, and often is even worse than the earlier approach. However, they can fool themselves for only so long.

There are endless commercials, commentaries, organizations, and people out there willing to entice you to try their “solution” to the hole. After a while you realize that it is all garbage. That purchase will rust, decay, and break. The twelve-step program probably will not change your life.

In fact, none of it works. The hole is still there.

Studying the Bible, it is easy to see that history is filled with people in the exact same situation. They have insecurities, they have weaknesses, and they are broken. They have a gaping hole in their lives and nothing they do permanently fills it. However, they, like us, are not alone. God addresses them, encourages them, encourages *us*, to come and let Him fill this hole. “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? ... Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.”³ In John 4, Christ spoke with a Samaritan woman, approaching the well near where he sat. This woman, the experts agree, was an outcast. She was coming to the well during the time of day when no one else would be there. She was purposefully trying to avoid people. She was a social pariah whose immorality was likely well known in the community. She was broken; she was the exposed version of many of us.

Christ spoke to her, which shocked her. Not only was she a social outcast, but she was a woman and a Samaritan, someone a Jewish male would not normally engage in conversation with. He asked her for a drink. She replied in shock that a Jew would even ask such a thing. He responded, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a

³ Isaiah 55:2-3 (NIV).

drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”⁴

What did he mean by living water? He clarifies in verse 13, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”⁵

Soul satisfaction. *Eternal* satisfaction.

That is what he is talking about; completeness – the fulfillment that ALL of us are longing for and cannot satisfy. *A thirst that is finally quenched; a hole that is finally filled.*

He confirms this point in the next few verses where she is exposed as a woman who has had five husbands and now was living with a man to whom she was not married, a big societal and religious no-no. Like all of us, she had a need. She needed to be needed. She needed to be loved. She had a hole in her heart and, like all of us, she kept trying to fill it; in this case, with husband after husband, never being satisfied, always thirsting. For the first time in her life, from coming to Christ, she would be filled.

She immediately then ran to tell all of her friends about him.

So, what am I getting at here? What is the purpose of all of this? Simple. You cannot fill the hole. *There is literally nothing you can purchase, no group you can join, no action you can take that will ever, ever fill that hole.* Perhaps you dove headfirst into a sinful life, trying to satisfy the undefinable longing. Perhaps you’ve spent a good portion of your life trying to drown out the call of the hole, trying to

⁴ John 4:10 (NIV).

⁵ *Id.* at v. 13.

quench the unquenchable thirst ... but you recognize it is still there. Or, perhaps you have spent ... your entire life walking in exactness and obedience to everything you've ever been taught. You have kept all the rules. You feel if anyone *should* feel complete, it should be you; you deserve it; *yet you still feel empty.*

The point of this book is that there is one, and only one, who can fill it for you and is willing to do so if you just ask Him. Regardless of your spiritual state, your emotional baggage, your complicated history, He will fill that hole or quench that thirst like nothing else can satisfy. Only coming to God through Christ will make you complete. And do not think for a second you have to “get your act together” before you can come to Him. That is a terrible mentality. He wants you as you are. He wants me as I am: broken and very aware of my brokenness. Christ did not hang out and eat with the pharisees; he hung out and ate with those who *knew* they were wicked. He did not tell the Samaritan woman that she had to clean up her life before he would give her the living water; *he told her that all she needed to do was ask.*

So, is my hole completely filled? No, but it is getting there. For the first time in my life I can feel the thirst being quenched, and the garbage that I used to attempt to fill the hole with becomes less appetizing every day. You may have left or be on the verge of leaving the Church. Perhaps you have tried some of the forbidden fruits of Mormonism, such as coffee or alcohol. Maybe you watched an R-rated movie, or two, or a hundred. Perhaps you have been having extra-marital relationships. Perhaps you are living a life that deep down you know is wrong, but it provides a distraction from the deep longing we all have. However, I suspect if you are reading this book, you have realized that the hole in your soul is still there: a void in your life that neither empty religion nor worldly pleasure has been able to fill.

I am writing this book to show you that you can have that hole filled.

You can feel satisfied. There is One who can fill that hole, indeed, the One who that hole is made for. I'm writing this book to show you that the things you've learned about other churches from the Mormon Church are mostly false: the apostasy, the authority, the traditional Mormon understanding of the trinity, the "saving ordinances," the need for blind faith and obedience to your earthly leaders, along with likely another million teachings; unfortunately, so many of them misleading, without foundation, and often outright false.

However, I want to be clear on one thing: I do not provide this information to bring anyone *from* faith in Christ, but instead to remove the weeds and thorns that have covered the truth and obscured the path to Christ. I hope this book helps to remove the veil that has been improperly put back in place. The purpose of this book is to clear the view so we can start anew, with honest, simple truth. Given the fact that you are reading this book, I hope that you have not given up the hope that you can find truth.

I promise you that you can find truth. That truth is in Christ. That truth *is* Christ.

The purpose of this book, ultimately, is to point you to Christ, and to show you that he is there. Although you may have been lied to in the past, it was not Christ who did that. Although you may have grown up with a lot of half-truths or things later proven to be false, those did not come from Christ. I beg you, please do not throw out Christ with the dirty bathwater of Mormon history. He is still waiting for you and has promised that if you seek him, you will find him.

The layout of this book may feel a bit convoluted at first. However, in order to lay a proper foundation and

understanding for someone who has left, is leaving, or is considering leaving Mormonism, it is necessary to explain a bit of the history and then lay a proper foundation. As mentioned, laying a proper foundation, however, first requires removing the false narratives and an incorrect foundation that is already there, so please bear with me. Additionally, for those who are unfamiliar with many of the nuances and facets of Mormonism, a bit more information and history are necessary.

As this book progresses, I hope to teach true biblical principles and contrast them with the principles you were taught growing up.

I start with the history of Mormonism, as told by the Mormon Church. We will then revisit some of that history with the unofficial facts that the Church admits but does not readily advertise for fear that it will drive existing members away. We will then move on to misconceptions that keep many people *in* Mormonism. Unfortunately, as you will see below, it is those same misconceptions that not only keep people away from investigating other churches or “mainstream” Christianity while they are in Mormonism but also avoiding them once they have left. Then, finally, with the area clear, we can start anew, with what the Gospel actually means, what Christianity actually is. I also intend to provide proof of what I’m talking about. I do not want you to take my word for it. I do not want you to trust my “feelings.” I want you to see that God has given us actual proof sufficient for us to believe in Him and in His Word.

You may not need to read all of this book.

Maybe you are already done with the Church, have no investment in that organization any longer and just want to move on. You do not believe *any* of it and are now just looking for something more substantial. If that is the case, then you

may be able to skip on to Chapter 5. However, if you are still holding on to parts of the Church, then I would suggest you continue on from here.

As we go through this journey together, I hope I do not offend anyone. By nature, I can be a little sarcastic and blunt at times...OK, really sarcastic. I have tried to tone down my rhetoric and I hope that, even if some sarcasm pokes through, you will not hold that against the thoughts and evidences being presented. I recognize that the faith you grew up with has likely been a massive part of your life and I understand what you are going through. I respect that and ask for your forgiveness if I come off as unsympathetic at all.

Chapter 1: Mormon Church History: An Overview

Although, I suspect, most of the people reading this book will be current or former members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints who are still searching for answers, I believe a recap of the general “official” version of Church history is necessary for an understanding of the rest of this book. I will only utilize official Church materials in providing this information and will not discuss or distinguish alternative versions in this chapter.

I will try to be brief, but still provide the necessary details. If you have been a Mormon all your life and have a good grasp on the Church’s official history, then you can probably skip this chapter. However, I do think it assists with some of the distinguishing that will take place in the next chapter.

The First Vision

In order to read the official version of the Church’s history, one need only look to the “Joseph Smith History” portion, often appended towards the end of the official Mormon Church canon of scripture. The history is not extremely lengthy, but long enough that I will summarize the primary points and identify the citations if you wish to look into it further.

Joseph Smith begins his narrative as a young man confused about the different denominations of the Christian churches. At the age of 15, four of his family members joined the Presbyterian faith.⁶ Joseph initially felt inclined to join the Methodists, but ultimately could not decide which faith to join.

⁶ Joseph Smith History, Verse 7.

He claimed that as he was “laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists,” he read in James chapter one verse five, which promises that God will answer and give wisdom to those who seek it. Joseph took those words to heart and felt that he must do as James directed and ask of God.⁷

Joseph then went to a thicket of woods in order to make his petition to God. As he started his prayer, he was “seized upon by some power” that overcame him and bound him so he could not speak and felt as if he was “doomed to sudden destruction.”⁸ Exerting all of his power, he called upon God to deliver him, when two heavenly beings appeared to him, with one pointing to the other stating “This is my Beloved. Hear Him!”⁹ Joseph claimed that he saw God the Father and Jesus Christ The Son, with both looking nearly identical in physical appearance. He asked them which church he should join, and he was told that he “must join none of them, for they were all wrong.” He was further told that “all their creeds were an abomination” in the sight of God and that the teachers of religion were corrupt and would draw near to God “with their lips, but their hearts are far from” Him.

Joseph then claims in his history that he later told one of the Methodist preachers about his vision, and he had been sharply rebuked. Years later another heavenly visitor would appear to Joseph, and on September 21, 1823, while in prayer, an angel by the name of Moroni appeared to him and told him about a book, which had been written upon gold plates and that gave “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang.” The angel also claimed that the “fullness of the everlasting gospel was

⁷ *Id.* at Verse 13.

⁸ *Id.* at 15.

⁹ *Id.* at 17.

contained in it.” He was also given instruction that there were two stones “in a silver bows-and the stones fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim.”¹⁰ Joseph was going to be the one to translate these plates for all people to have this fulness of the Gospel.

The Translation

Eventually Joseph would venture to the hill where the plates and other items were buried; however, he was originally forbidden from taking the plates back. He was told that it would be another four years until he would be allowed to bring the golden plates back and translate them. During this time he married Emma Smith and on September 22, 1827 he went to the place where the golden plates were buried and “the same heavenly messenger delivered them” to Joseph, warning him that he would be responsible for them.¹¹ Due to nature of golden plates being found, and the potential financial value therefrom, Joseph would then have to go forward taking precautions to hide the plates from anyone.

In the meantime, Joseph would meet with an individual by the name of Martin Harris, who would later assist with the translation process. Joseph also decided to copy a series of characters from the plates along with some of his translation, so that they could be verified. According to the story, Martin Harris took the handwritten copy of letters and brought them to Professor Charles Anthon, who informed him that the translation was correct, “more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian.”¹² Martin also showed him portions that had not yet been translated, and Charles Anthon informed him that they “were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac,

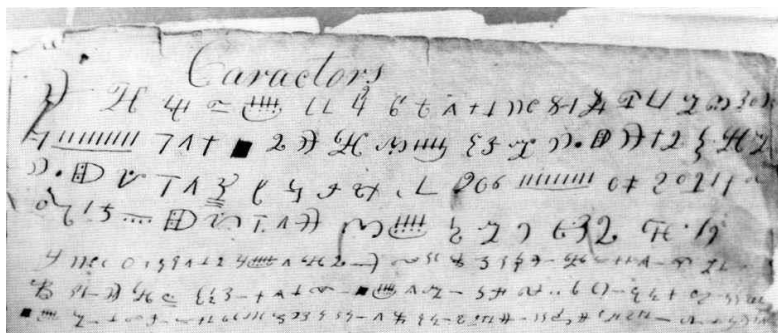
¹⁰ *Id.* at 34-35.

¹¹ *Id.* at 59.

¹² *Id.* at 31.

and Arabic; and he said they were true characters.”¹³ He gave Martin a certificate, warranting the same. However, upon leaving the house of Anthon, Martin was asked how he came about these golden plates. Martin informed Professor Anthon that “an angel of God had revealed it unto him.” Upon hearing this, Professor Anthon requested the certificate back, and then tore it to shreds, stating that “there was no such thing now as ministering of angels.”¹⁴

Here are the characters, presumably those presented to Professor Anthon.



15

The translation process continued; however, in the official Church history, it gives virtually no details as to *how* the translation process took place. On April 5, 1829, Joseph met another man by the name of Oliver Cowdery who would assist further with the translation process.¹⁶ In the meantime he would also have a visit from the heavenly John the Baptist who conferred the priesthood, or authority to baptize, and commanded Joseph and Oliver to baptize each other. The

¹³ *Id.* at 64.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ This image is in the Public Domain and available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthon_Transcript#/media/File:Caractors_1arge.jpg.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 66.

official narrative in Joseph Smith History ends here in the Mormon canon, however, they would go forth and begin the Church. In the Church's history, there is also a relevant event (that never sat well with this author) that occurred during the translation process. I include it here because it is relevant and is actually part of Church history.

In June of 1828, Joseph Smith allowed Martin Harris to bring the 116 pages that they had thus far translated to show his wife. He wanted to show her that he was not wasting his time and was doing the work of God. The pages largely consisted of what was called the "Book of Lehi." Martin Harris' wife, Lucy Harris, took the pages and hid them. She felt that Joseph was a fraud, and she wanted to prove such, so she hid the pages and refused to return them to her husband. She felt that if he were truly a prophet, and if they were truly translating, then Joseph would be able to recreate the original 116 pages. Indeed, if you have the original source material, you should be able to retranslate and come up with a substantially similar translation.

Joseph Smith did not attempt to re-translate the pages, subsequently claiming that God told him not to translate them again.

In the original 1830 Book of Mormon, there was an explanation provided as follows:

To The Reader--As many false reports have been circulated respecting the following work, and also many unlawful measures taken by the evil designing persons to destroy me, and also the work, I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi,

which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some person or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again--and being commanded of the Lord that I should not translate the same over again, for Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God, by altering the words, that they did read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written; and If I should bring forth the same words again, or in other words, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up their hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work: but behold, the Lord said unto me, I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design in this thing: therefore thou shalt translate from the plates of Nephi, until ye come to that which ye have translated, which ye have retained; and behold ye shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words. I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will shew unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil. Wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, I have, through his grace and mercy, accomplished that which he hath commanded me respecting this thing. I would also inform you that the plates of which hath been spoken,

were found in the township of Manchester,
Ontario county, New-York.¹⁷

In other words, Lucy Harris was in concert with Satan for wanting to prove that Joseph Smith was a legitimate prophet and was performing a legitimate translation. According to this, the Devil had put it into the hearts of nefarious people that if Joseph re-translated the same pages from the Book of Mormon, these nefarious people would then alter the original documents they had stolen so that they would be different from the retranslation, to show that the Book of Mormon was false and that Joseph Smith was not a prophet.

This preface is no longer found in the Mormon Church's copies of the Book of Mormon, in fact, on the current Church website, it has distanced itself from Lucy Harris entirely and now just simply claims that:

In June 1828, Joseph Smith reluctantly allowed his scribe Martin Harris to borrow 116 pages of the original Book of Mormon manuscript. Harris promised to guard the pages and show them only to certain family members, but the pages soon disappeared and have never been recovered. Joseph sought divine guidance on how to proceed with the rest of the translation and learned by revelation how to complete the Book of Mormon translation without revisiting the text contained in the missing manuscript.¹⁸

¹⁷ Book of Mormon, p. 1, Herald Heritage Reprint.

¹⁸ Thechurchofjesuschrist.org, Lost Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, *available at:*

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/lost-manuscript-of-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>.

Book of Mormon Promise

The Book of Mormon contains a promise at the end of the Book, asking you to pray to know whether this is true. Mormons traditionally use this as their evidence for confirmation about the truthfulness of not only the Book of Mormon, but also the Church itself. As a missionary for the Church, I would regularly invite people to read from 3 Nephi 11 (which, ironically is a mixture of direct quotes or reworded lines from the New Testament words of Christ) and then invite them to ask to know whether the Book of Mormon was true. As you will see later, this “feeling” is the primary source of evidence the Church uses to prove itself.

Other Scriptures

The Mormon Church accepts the Bible, specifically the King James Version, which it still uses today for its English-speaking members, but also held the Book of Mormon in greater esteem as it came directly from God and was not susceptible to the errors of transmission like the Bible. The Book of Mormon, however, is not the only canon of the Mormon faith.

According to the Church, they confirm that “The Doctrine and Covenants is a book of scripture containing revelations from the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith and to a few other latter-day prophets. It is unique in scripture because it is not a translation of ancient documents.”¹⁹ The Church also affirms that the Doctrine and Covenants, per Joseph Smith, is the “foundation of the Church in these last days.”²⁰

¹⁹ ChurchofJesusChrist.org, Doctrine and Covenants, *available at:* <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/doctrine-and-covenants?lang=eng>.

²⁰ *Id.*

The last of the canon of the Mormon faith is a book called “The Pearl of Great Price.” It contains two books: The Book of Moses and The Book of Abraham. While the Book of Moses was a revelation to Joseph Smith about supposed writings of Moses, the Book of Abraham purports to be a translation of Egyptian papyrus scrolls. According to the Church on July 3, 1835 a man named Michael Chandler brought several Egyptian mummies and papyrus scrolls to the newly forming Mormon community.²¹ Joseph Smith, with assistance from church members, bought the scrolls, and then would proceed to “translate” them. He stated, “I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham. ... Truly we can say, the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth”²² Thus, in total, Mormons use four sets of scripture: The Book of Mormon, the Bible, the Doctrine & Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. This makes up the Mormon canon of scripture. I would add, however, that the Church believes in “modern revelation,” so the Mormon beliefs are somewhat evolving over time with general conferences, changes in Church doctrines, and ongoing revelation.

Salvation

Although this is not part of the Mormon “history” so to speak, I believe a discussion on “salvation” is necessary for a better understanding of the rest of this book and Mormon belief in general. When it comes to “being saved,” Mormons have a different idea from traditional Christianity. Salvation may be through grace, but only after you do everything you

²¹ The Pearl of Great Price, ChurchofJesusChrist.org, published in the February 1987 Friend, *available at:*
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/friend/1987/02/the-pearl-of-great-price?lang=eng>.

²² History of the Church, 2:236.

can, in other words, God kicks in salvation at the end *if you've* done everything you can.²³ Additionally, for salvation and exaltation, you must have the necessary “saving ordinances” performed (or performed for you if you’ve already died without the Mormon gospel).²⁴ Unlike Christianity, which teaches a heaven and a hell, or a salvation and a damnation, Mormonism has multiple and several-tiered heavens, including the Telestial Kingdom, which is where most sinners will go so long as they have not committed the unpardonable sin of denying the Holy Ghost, and only after they have suffered through hell. These are people who rejected the Gospel of Christ. After hell, they will be redeemed to this state of glory, so to speak.²⁵

The next level up is coined the Terrestrial Kingdom, reserved for those who did not accept Christ while living, but after death did accept him. It’s a better place and a greater glory than the Telestial. Finally, there is the Celestial Kingdom, or “exaltation” as frequently noted in Mormonism. This heaven is reserved for those who have accepted Christ in the flesh and received all of the necessary ordinances, including baptism, confirmation, the sacrament, the Melchizedek Priesthood (for men), the temple ordinances, and a temple marriage. These are the ones who will live with

²³ 2 Nephi 25:23 (“For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”).

²⁴ “In the Church the word ordinance usually refers to rites and ceremonies that the Lord has given us for our salvation, guidance, and comfort.” *The Purpose of Priesthood Ordinances, Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood: Basic Manual for Priesthood Holders, Part B*, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/duties-and-blessings-of-the-priesthood-basic-manual-for-priesthood-holders-part-b/priesthood-and-church-government/lesson-4-the-purpose-of-priesthood-ordinances?lang=eng>.

²⁵ Doctrine and Covenants, 76:81-90.

God.²⁶ There is a slight caveat, however, in that Mormons believe the Celestial Kingdom itself is divided into three separate heavens, the highest is reserved for those who have received a temple marriage. According to the Mormon Cannon, these people shall “be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting ... because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.”²⁷

In short, Mormons believe that most good people will end up in the Terrestrial Kingdom, the really wicked will end up in the Telestial Kingdom after suffering the pains of hell, and the ones who have followed Christ and received all of the necessary ordinances, including being married in the temple, shall inherit the Celestial Kingdom and eventually move on to become gods themselves.

As you may now realize, this makes it complicated when a non-Mormon individual talks with a Mormon about salvation; a traditional Christian refers to salvation simply as going to heaven and living in heaven with God. Mormons believe salvation involves multiple glories or levels that virtually all will inherit regardless of circumstance. Thus, a Mormon may agree that a non-Mormon is saved, but that may mean he or she may only make it to the Terrestrial or even the

²⁶ Doctrine and Covenants, 76:50-70; see also, *The Purpose of Priesthood Ordinances*, Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood: Basic Manual for Priesthood Holders, Part B, *available at* <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/duties-and-blessings-of-the-priesthood-basic-manual-for-priesthood-holders-part-b/priesthood-and-church-government/lesson-4-the-purpose-of-priesthood-ordinances?lang=eng>, which states, “President Wilford Woodruff said: ‘No [one] will receive of the celestial glory except it be through the ordinances of the House of God.’”

²⁷ Doctrine and Covenants, 132:19-20.

Telestial Kingdom. They may be saved, but not exalted and not necessarily allowed to live with God either.

The Breakup

After Joseph Smith died on June 27, 1844, the Church was in turmoil. The very fate of the Church was thrown into question. This period of time is sometimes referred to as the “succession crisis.” There is a term to Google if you are unfamiliar with it. Virtually all questioned who was to take the helm of the Church and lead as the next prophet. At this point there arose several contenders including Joseph Smith III (Joseph’s young Son), Sidney Rigdon, Brigham Young, and James Strang. Many members believed that there were indications from Joseph Smith that his son was to succeed him in leading the Church, though he was only eleven years old at the time of his father’s passing. There were others as well, including Sidney Rigdon, who continued to campaign for his role as the “guardian” of the Church even after Brigham Young had taken the helm, which would lead to his excommunication from the Church. James Strang, who was an elder in the Church, purportedly had a letter from Joseph designating him as the proper successor. Additionally, James Strang claimed that he found and translated additional plates, which translation was called the “Book of the Law of the Lord.” Many notable Mormons at the time, including Lucy Smith and most of the witnesses to the golden plates followed Strang.

Ultimately, the majority of the church sided with and accepted Brigham Young as their next leader, though many still did not accept his leadership and formed their own organizations. Those believing Joseph Smith III was to be the next prophet formed the Reorganized Church (now called the Community of Christ) and they constitute the largest breakoff from the Utah-based Brigham Young-following Mormon

Church.²⁸ However, those following James Strang established their own church, which still exists today in Voree, Wisconsin.²⁹

One could write for volumes about what happened during and after this period (indeed, it has been written and is out there if you want to read it), however, the purpose of this chapter is to give you a general overview or refresher of the Church's version of events, before we analyze the official narrative in greater detail.

²⁸ <https://www.cofchrist.org/>

²⁹ <https://www.ldsstrangite.com/>

Chapter 2: Church History Revisited

I will now attempt to provide a more detailed description of the Church's less-scripted history, that few active members of the Church even know about, though the facts are readily available to them in their own books. Although the Church has come out and acknowledged the discrepancies and dilemmas discussed below, such acknowledgments are rarely found on the front page, and the official rebuttal from the Church is often less than satisfactory and buried multiple pages deep below the official versions.

Before we go on, I want to reiterate something here. The following facts are not things that, to my knowledge, are disputed by the Church. The Church readily acknowledges the information below but comes to a different conclusion based on the evidence presented. While investigating the problematic areas of Church history, I did not find such information from "anti-Mormon" sources as church leaders will often insinuate about those who find facts contrary to its traditional narrative. Whenever I heard something problematic, *my first resource was the Church itself*. I would search for the official Church version, its analysis as to the problematic area, and what possible alternative explanations were available.

I suspect you may be familiar with some of this information, and perhaps this information represents the very reason you have doubts about your faith. I hate to rehash what you already know, but I do believe it is necessary to clear up some of the misinformation or to at least tell the other side of the story. As indicated earlier, I tried for a long, long time to cling to aspects of Mormonism. This kept me stuck in an awkward and illogical place of "buffet Mormonism." I hope to

help resolve some of these issues, clear the weeds, and replace them with truths that you may be unaware of.

With that in mind, let's recap what we've discussed above.

The “First” Vision

As discussed above, Joseph claimed to have seen God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son in answer to his prayers. However, the official version promulgated as the official history of the Church, is just one of the many versions of the First Vision.

The Church, to its credit, has acknowledged and published several “official” versions of the First Vision. In the first “official” earliest account from 1832, Joseph claims to have “cried unto the Lord for mercy” and at sixteen years old (notice the one-year time difference, as the Church’s official version indicates that this occurred at age 15) he saw the Jesus who forgave him of his sins and commanded him to “walk in [his] statutes and keep [his] commandments.” The entire text of the first vision is as follows, with the errors in the original:

[T]herefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go and to obtain mercy and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness and while in the attitude of calling upon the Lord in the 16th year of my age a pillar of fire light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of god and the Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee. go thy <way walk in my statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of

glory I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have Eternal life behold the world lieth in sin and at this time and none doeth good no not one they have turned asside from the gospel and keep not <my> commandments they draw near to me with their lips while their hearts are far from me and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them acording to thir ungodliness and to bring to pass that which <hath> been spoken by the mouth of the prophets and Ap[o]stles behold and lo I come quickly as it [is?] written of me in the cloud < clothed> in the glory of my Father. ³⁰

Interestingly, in this first official version from the church and in the handwriting of Joseph, you'll notice that there is nothing about two beings, nothing about asking which church to join, and nothing about an unseen power seizing him. It was basically a vision about forgiveness of sins, the condemnation of the world, and that Christ would come again soon.

The next "official" account is from 1835, which is also quite short, and I will provide the entire text as follows, with the errors in the original:

I called upon the Lord for the first time, in the place above stated or in other words I made a fruitless attempt to pray, my tounge seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me, <I> strove

³⁰ "History, circa Summer 1832," p. 3, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 30, 2018, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/3>.

again to pray, but could not, the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung up on my feet, and and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking, I kneeled again my mouth was opened and my toung liberated, and I called on the Lord in mighty prayer, a pillar of fire appeared above my head, it presently rested down upon my <me> head, and filled me with joy unspeakable, a personage appeard in the midst, of this pillar of flame which was spread all around, and yet nothing consumed, another personage soon appeard like unto the first, he said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee, he testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God; <and I saw many angels in this vision> I was about 14. years old when I received this first communication.³¹

Again, there is nothing about which church to join, and nothing about an unseen power seizing him, though he did claim his tongue was swollen initially and he had difficulty speaking. Notice also, that this text also varies from the official version which states he had the vision at 15, now claiming that it was when he was 14 years old, also different from the other version that claimed he was 16 years old. Like the first account, this one only addresses the sins of Joseph that had been forgiven. Interestingly, there *were* two visitors in this vision, however, neither appears to have been specifically identified as God the Father or Jesus Christ the son, and there

³¹ “*Journal, 1835–1836*,” p. 23, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 30, 2018, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/24>.

were also “many angels” in this vision, while there were no angels in any of the other firsthand accounts.

Next is the official 1838 account, recorded *six years* after the original firsthand account, which is the version traditionally used by the Church and referred to earlier. Additionally, there are other accounts, though they are not from Joseph himself (they are from people he may have told the vision to), many of which are several years earlier than the first version from the Church written down by Joseph. All-in-all, there are upwards of nine different First Vision accounts, with large discrepancies between them.

While one could argue that there were errors from others who heard the accounts, and one could make arguments against anyone who isn't Joseph himself and was recounting the events at a later date, apparently the only account that even was in Joseph's handwriting is the first account provided above, which leaves out two personages, leaves out any details about which church to join, and has nothing about an unseen power seizing him. If one had truly been seized by an unseen power, to the point where he thought death was imminent, wouldn't that be recorded? Further, if he had *actually seen* God the Father, isn't that something one would have written down? If he had been told that there was no true church and he was to establish the true church, isn't that something he would have memorialized at that time?

As you can see, even utilizing only these versions of the First Vision that the Church acknowledges as authentic, one must be extremely skeptical about the validity of the First Vision as a whole.

The Book of Mormon “Translation”

Growing up as a child in the Church, you often see paintings of Joseph Smith at a table, staring intently into the

golden plates while the scribe is sitting on the other side of the table with a cloth draped between them so that the scribe could not see the plates. Some depictions show Joseph and the scribe sitting right there with no divider, though no one has ever admitted to ever seeing the plates during the translation process. As stated above, the Church simply claims that Joseph translated the plates by the “gift and power of God,” without providing any further explanation. The artistic interpretation just described is how most Mormon youth pictured the translation process ensuing. However, the Church itself acknowledges this to be largely inaccurate, and admits that for much of the translation process the golden plates were not even present.

It was not until 2015, when the Church published an article in the Ensign entitled, “Joseph the Seer,” did the Church acknowledge on a great scale, with photos of one of the stones, that Joseph used a “seer stone” for the translation process.³² However, it was documented by early Church members. A brief summary of this Book of Mormon translation process was described by David Whitmer, in his book “An Address to All Believers in Christ” (which is available online for free).

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing.

³² See *Joseph Smith the Seer*, Printed in the October 2015 Ensign, available at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/10/joseph-the-seer?lang=eng>.

One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus, the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.³³

This is supported by Joseph's wife, who acted as his initial scribe when the translation process began. In the "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," she stated as follows:

Question. What of the truth of Mormonism?

Answer. I know Mormonism to be the truth; and believe the Church to have been established by divine direction. I have complete faith in it. In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.³⁴

Joseph's face buried in a hat was not exactly the image I had in mind growing up in the Church. Although it is

³³ An Address to All Believers in Christ, p. 11 ,Part First, Chapter 1. Also, Interview given to Kansas City Journal, June 5, 1881, reprinted in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Journal of History, vol. 8, (1910), pp. 299-300.

³⁴ Last Testimony of Sister Emma," Saint's Herald, Vol. 26, No 19. p. 289. (1 October 1879) (also available online at: https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Source:Last_Testimony_of_Sister_Emma).

theoretically possible that God *could* talk to someone this way, since Moses spoke to God through a burning bush, I felt it was inconsistent with the narrative growing up and actually contradicts other explanations the Church gave to justify the mistakes in the Book of Mormon.

Let me explain.

Once the hype and controversy surrounding the seer stone surfaced in 2015, the Church created a seemingly scripted interview with a Dr. Ashurst-McGee, where he would explain the translation process in greater detail. In discussing the seer stone, he stated that Joseph's use of a seer stone was more "convenient" and was "actually not that strange." He claims that Joseph was simply "trying to block out light." He compares the seer stone to a cellphone, stating, "It's like on a really sunny day when you get a text and you pull out your cellphone [but] you can't see it because of the sun, [so] you make shade [and] you block out the light so you can see what it says. It's the same kind of idea."³⁵ In other words, he would *read actual words* on the seer stone, and such was easier to see in a dark hat. This is actually pretty close to the description from David Whitmer above.

However, here is the problem with that explanation.

Growing up, I had heard of translation issues, errors and additions in the King James Version of the Bible, which somehow ended up into the Book of Mormon.³⁶ I had heard of

³⁵ Seer Stones and the Translation of the Book of Mormon, Gospel Media, *available at*: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/video/answers-to-church-history-questions/2017-11-0120-seer-stones-and-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>.

³⁶ For example, in 2 Nephi there are multiple words that were added for understanding in the KJV of the Bible, and they were left italicized because they were not in the original manuscript; but somehow they also

a Shakespeare quote ending up in the Book of Mormon. I noticed that the book of Nephi used almost the exact same language to justify the killing of Laban that Caiaphas had used to justify the killing of Jesus.³⁷ I had heard of a myriad of grammatical and other errors showing up in the original manuscripts. How could this be explained? As a child, I was told that we “really don’t know much about the translation process,” and that, perhaps, thoughts were conveyed to Joseph by the Holy Spirit and he would use the language he was familiar with to convey those thoughts to paper. In other words, the Book of Mormon was not a word-for-word translation so much as it was conveying of the general ideas that were presented and putting those ideas on paper. It was explained such in the September 1977 Ensign, where Richard Lloyd Anderson wrote:

This seems to indicate that Joseph Smith’s assignment was to understand the ideas of the ancient language and place them, with all their nuances, in coherent English. Obviously the first step, understanding completely the meaning of an unknown language, was more difficult than transferring those ideas, once grasped, into English. Assistance from the Spirit was vital in the understanding stage, or the Prophet would have had no idea where to begin! And that initial step is where direct revelation would operate, according to the Doctrine and Covenants.

ended up as the actual words in the 2 Nephi renditions of the same passage.

³⁷ Compare 1 Nephi 4:13 (“It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.”) with John 11:50 (JCV) (“Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.”).

Nothing in Doctrine and Covenants 8 or 9 suggests that Oliver Cowdery (and thus Joseph Smith) was to be given perfect final language—rather he was to be inspired in the fundamental thought to be translated...

The Church unofficially faced this problem at the turn of the century when a letter came to President Joseph F. Smith asking how the Church could justify grammatical corrections if the Book of Mormon were truly inspired. President Smith directed Elder B. H. Roberts to reply to the question, and his answers appeared in Church publications after discussion and basic concord was reached with Church leaders. Elder Roberts acknowledged that this was less than an official statement, but it involved General Authorities in thinking through the implications of the evidence.

As explained by Elder Roberts, the Prophet grasped “every detail and shade of thought” of the original by revelation, but expressed himself “in such language as he could command.” On occasion that was “faulty English, which the Prophet himself and those who have succeeded him as the custodians of the word of God have had and now have a perfect right to correct.”³⁸

In other words, there are two alternative and contradictory explanations for the same issue, each having its

³⁸ By the Gift and Power of God, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Published in the September 1977 Ensign, *available at:* <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/09/by-the-gift-and-power-of-god?lang=eng>.

own issues. If, according to this position that Joseph was only using his own language to convey a general idea, then why was it necessary to block out the light so he could read the words? How could the sun block out a general idea conveyed to his mind? And if Joseph was reading actual words, then, as apparently President Joseph F. Smith was unable to explain, what is the justification for the thousands of grammatical changes and corrections that were performed on the Book of Mormon? As you will see, whenever the Church is pushed into a corner regarding a very difficult area of history, it comes up with multiple alternative theories which routinely contradict each other and the original history as presented by those around Joseph Smith.

Book of Mormon Witnesses

I think we now need to discuss the witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Growing up, this was one of the pinnacles of evidence for the veracity of the Book of Mormon. How does someone go about just ignoring their testimony that they actually beheld the plates that Joseph Smith translated? Indeed, the testimony of the three witnesses is as follows and is found in the introductory pages of the Book of Mormon:

BE IT KNOWN unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the

work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is One God. Amen.³⁹

The testimony of the eight witnesses is similar, yet quite different:

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That Joseph Smith, Jun., the translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our

³⁹ The Testimony of the Three Witnesses, Introduction to the Book of Mormon.

hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has shown unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world, to witness unto the world that which we have seen. And we lie not, God bearing witness of it.⁴⁰

Something that always struck me as odd, though I still never questioned it until after I was transitioning from the Church, is that the three witnesses apparently had to have a *heavenly vision* in order to see the plates. These plates had already been in Joseph Smith's possession, so why did they have to go out and have a heavenly visitor appear to them to show the plates that Joseph already had? If they had been in a wooden box under his bed, why did they have to travel out into the woods to have a heavenly visitor show them the plates? Assuming that it was because the plates had already been taken away by an angel, one must ask: why were they taken away by an angel in the first place? It was not exactly logical, but I didn't really question it until later.

Regardless, let us analyze the witnesses themselves.

Let us begin with the first set, the three witnesses including Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. The key to understanding all of these witnesses is that their reliability is, at best, extremely questionable. In my practice as an attorney, I am constantly interviewing and deposing

⁴⁰ The Testimony of the Eight Witnesses, Introduction to the Book of Mormon.

witnesses. Unfortunately, more than 50% of the time the witnesses tell multiple lies all while under oath and looking me directly in the eyes. Often, they will even break into tears discussing the extent of their injury and an untrained eye would probably believe them. They will talk about how they haven't been out of the house and can barely walk ever since the accident six months ago, but after they've finished their story, I'll pull up a video on my laptop where they were loading hundreds of pounds of equipment into the back of a truck and clearly running a flooring company. Whoops.

Thus, one should view *any* witness statement with a critical eye; this is especially in the case where the witnesses are not giving testimony in their own words, but signing a pre-printed, pre-prepared statement for them to essentially agree to. That is the other thing to recognize about witnesses: everyone has their own point of view. Even though three people may witness the exact same event, there will always be variances based on what they remember and their point of view during the event. In the case at hand, we do not have the opportunity to know what they actually saw because someone prepared (it is unclear who actually wrote the statement) a statement that they just signed. As you will see below, according to Martin Harris, *the witnesses were actually reluctant to agree to the pre-printed statement.*

Unable to analyze the validity of the statement itself, we then need to turn to the credibility and motivation of the witnesses. One thing to note about many, if not all, of the witnesses (the three and the eight) is that, at least according to some authors, they believed in “second sight.”⁴¹ That is, that they could see things with their “spiritual eyes,” that might not be able to be seen with their physical eyes. They would be

⁴¹ Grant Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, p. 175, Signature Books, 2002.

prone to visions, often which sometimes sounded quite strange, and they would believe such visions to be true. For example, Martin Harris was described as one with an imagination that was “excitable and fecund.”⁴² Describing in greater detail, Ronald Walker describes Harris as follows:

Many accounts suggest that Harris was a visionary. “Marvelousness” was his “predominating phrenological development,” remembered Pomeroy Tucker, who seemed to like and respect the man. He was given to a “belief in dreams, ghosts, hobgoblins, ‘special providences,’ terrestrial visits of angels, [and] the interposition of ‘devils’ to afflict sinful men.” John Gilbert, the Palmyra printer, likewise found him to be “superstitious,” someone who “pretended to see things.” Lorenzo Saunders, who claimed to know the Harris family well, was more colloquial. “There can’t anybody say a word against Martin Harris” he asserted. “Martin was a good citizen . . . a man that would do just as he agreed with you. But, he was a great man for seeing spooks.” Once while reading scripture, he reportedly mistook a candle’s sputtering as a sign that the devil desired to stop him. Another time he excitedly awoke from his sleep believing that a creature as large as a dog had been upon his chest, though a nearby associate could find nothing to confirm his fears. Several

⁴² Ronald W. Walker, *Martin Harris: Mormonism’s Early Convert*, p. 35, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19 (Winter 1986), p. 35. As of March 22, 2019, this issue is available at: <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/issues/V19N04.pdf>.

hostile and perhaps unreliable accounts told of visionary experiences with Satan and Christ, Harris once reporting that Christ had been poised on a roof beam. But such talk came easy. His exaggerated sense of the supernatural naturally produced caricature and tall and sometimes false tales.⁴³

Additionally, prior to meeting Joseph Smith and joining the Mormon Church, Martin Harris had first been an orthodox Quaker, then a Universalist, then a “Restorationer,” followed by becoming a Baptist and then a Presbyterian.⁴⁴ Based on his extraordinarily fickle nature and overactive imagination, he is not one I would want to be my key witness in any trial of any remote importance. He would likely be impeached and discredited immediately. Further, after Joseph Smith died, he, David Whitmer, and all eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon believed in and followed James Strang as a prophet, who had supposedly translated his own metal plates. Oliver Cowdery was the only one who did not believe in and follow Strang.

Unfortunately for the Church, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer are not much better witnesses. When one reads the pre-prepared statement of the three witnesses, it sounds as though they, with natural eyes, saw an angel of God who came down and presented the plates to them. However, in subsequent accounts regarding this event, Whitmer described this as a vision, as opposed to something he saw with his physical eyes.⁴⁵ In fact, he described it as a vision for all of the

⁴³ *Id.* (citations in original).

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ An Address to All Believers in Christ, p. 32, Part Second, Chapter 3 (“In June, 1829, the Lord called Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and myself as the three witnesses, **to behold the vision of the Angel**, as

witnesses, not just himself.⁴⁶ Martin Harris similarly described his vision of the plates. When he was asked if he had actually seen the plates with his own eyes, he responded, “I did not see them as I do that pencil case, yet I saw them with the eye of faith; I saw them just as distinctly as I see anything around me—though at the time they were covered over with a cloth.”⁴⁷ (Did the angel show them with a cloth?) Similarly, John Whitmer, one of the eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon, described that they saw the plates “by a supernatural power.”⁴⁸ If, as the testimony of the eight witnesses implies, Joseph Smith simply presented the plates to the witnesses, then why the description of a “supernatural power?” Among all of the witnesses, Oliver Cowdery is probably the most credible, but even subsequent statements by others, including subsequent prophets and leaders of the Church, indicate that Oliver also seemed to only see such with his spiritual eyes and had gone to some sort of cave in the Hill Cumorah to see the plates.⁴⁹

recorded in the fore part of the Book of Mormon, and to bear testimony to the world that the Book of Mormon is true.”).

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, pp. 256-57, Philadelphia, W.J. & J.K. Simon; New York, Robert Carter, 1842.

⁴⁸ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 volumes, edited by Brigham H. Roberts, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 3:307–308.

⁴⁹ Wilford Woodruff Journal, 11 December 1869 (“But He went [into] a Cave in the Hill Comoro with Oliver Cowdery & deposited those plates upon a table or shelf. In that room were deposited a large amount of gold plates Containing sacred records & when they first visited that Room the sword of Laban was Hanging upon the wall & when they last visited it the sword was drawn from the scabbard and laid upon a table.”). *See also*, Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 5 May 1867 (“President [Heber C.] Kimball talked familiarly to the brethren about Father Smith, [Oliver] Cowdery, and others walking into the hill Cumorah and seeing records upon records piled upon table[s,] they walked from cell to cell and saw the records that were piled up...”).

On March 25, 1838 Martin Harris publicly announced that *none* of the witnesses had actually seen the plates with their own eyes or handled them and they were actually hesitant to sign the pre-written testimonies of the witnesses. It was this statement that caused Apostles Lyman E. Johnson, Luke S. Johnson, and John F. Boynton, along with high priest Stephen Burnett and Warren Parrish of the Seventy, to leave the church. In a letter to Lyman E Johnson, Burnett wrote on April 15, 1838:

I have reflected long and deliberately upon the history of this church & weighed the evidence for & against it — loth to give it up — but when I came to hear Martin Harris state in a public ~~congregation~~ that he never saw the plates with his natural eyes only in vision or imagination, neither Oliver [Cowdery] nor David [Whitmer] & also that the eight witnesses never saw them & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it, the last pedestal gave way, in my view our foundations was sapped & the entire superstructure fell a heap of ruins, I therefore three week[s] since in the Stone Chapel gave a full history of the church since I became acquainted with it, the false preaching & prophecy [prophesying] of Joseph [Smith] together with the reasons why I took the course which I was resolved to do, and renounced the Book of Mormon with the whole scene of lying and deception practiced by J[oseph]. S[mith] & S[idney]. R[igdon] in this church, believing as I verily do, that it is all a wicked deception palmed upon us unawares.

I was followed by W[arren]. Par[r]ish[,] Luke Johnson & John Boynton all of who concurred with me, after we were done speaking M[artin] Harris arose & said he was sorry for any man who rejected the Book of Mormon for he knew it was true, he said he had hefted the plates repeatedly in a box with only a tablecloth or a handkerchief over them, but he never saw them only as he saw a city through a mountain. And said that he never should have told that the testimony of the eight [witnesses] was false, if it had not been picked out of [h]im but should have let it passed as it was.⁵⁰

This is just a taste of the dozens of accounts supporting the fact that the witnesses did not actually see the plates. As far as witness credibility, I would not want to call any of them to the stand to testify. As we will discuss now, the problem with the plates and the Book of Mormon translation doesn't end here.

“Reformed Egyptian” and Professor Anthon

This is one of the more interesting parts of the traditional narrative.

As described earlier, Joseph Smith transcribed some of the characters in the Book of Mormon and had them taken to Professor Charles Anthon to verify their accuracy. Martin Harris claimed that Professor Anthon informed him that they were correct “more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian.”⁵¹ However, Charles Anthon has repeatedly denied ever saying such. Specifically, in 1834

⁵⁰ Letter of Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, 15 April 1838, Joseph Smith Letterbook, 2:64-66, d155/2:2, LDS Archives.

⁵¹ Joseph Smith History, ¶64.

Professor Anthon wrote a letter stating that “the whole story about my having pronounced the Mormonite inscription to be ‘reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics’ is perfectly false...I soon came to the conclusion that it was all a trick, perhaps a hoax.”⁵² In a later letter, Professor Anthon stated that he told Martin Harris that this was all likely part of “a scheme to cheat the farmer [Harris] of his money.”⁵³

While you could certainly just view this as a “he-said-she-said” scenario, this entire narrative by Joseph Smith and Martin Harris is, at a minimum, questionable. Further, in my mind, the bigger picture here is the “Reformed Egyptian” that Joseph claims the plates were written in.

As I will describe later in my sections on evidence, when it comes to archeological support for the Bible, *there are mountains of evidence*. The books of the Bible, including the New Testament Gospels and the letters of Paul can be found in fragments throughout the Middle East. Due to the lack of a printing press, copies were all handmade and often, once the copy was so used that it began to fade or become illegible, then the worn-out documents would be utilized in another form. Josh McDowell describes the process as follows:

Once a papyrus document began to deteriorate or the writing started to fade, it was copied onto a new papyrus and the original was discarded. This was true of the apostles’ writings as well. But the ancients did not live in a throwaway society as we do today. Nothing that could be used again or repaid was ever trashed. People often gathered up discarded

⁵² Howe, E. D. (17 February 1834). “Anthon to E. D. Howe”. *Mormonism Unveiled*. Painesville, Ohio: Telegraph Press, 1834.

⁵³ Ridenour, Fritz *So What's the Difference?*, pp. 154–56, Regal Books (1973).

pieces of papyrus to, in effect, recycle them. They would dampen them and press them together to form various items... Egyptian mortuary priests used discarded papyri to form papier-mâché, which they used as the infrastructure of mummy coverings or other objects.⁵⁴

In other words, when the scriptures wore out, they were recycled, and that process resulted in Bible fragments and portions being found everywhere in the biblical regions of the world. As we will discuss in greater detail later, there are literally thousands of ancient manuscripts and fragments, supporting the historicity of the Bible and reliability of the translation process. In other words, there are actual scriptures directly from the Bible books written in Hebrew and Greek that are found throughout the Middle East.

On the other hand, regarding the Book of Mormon, Joseph claimed that the plates were written in a “reformed Egyptian.” He copied the characters and those are readily available for anyone to see, and they have already been provided earlier. There is no dispute that, unlike the Bible, *there are absolutely no manuscripts from any of the stories in the Book of Mormon—anywhere*. There are not even microscopic fragments of any book of Mormon passages anywhere in the world. Even worse, if this was the language of these ancient peoples of the Americas, if this was the language they used (reading or speaking), one would expect this language, or at least some of these characters, to show up somewhere, *or anywhere for that matter*. It would be on some ancient ruins, it would be found inscribed on some stone somewhere or pottery fragments, perhaps some ancient plate

⁵⁴ McDowell, Josh, *God-Breathed: The Undeniable Power and Reliability of Scripture*, p. 27, 2015.

would use the same characters. However, there is nothing. These funny looking characters, *which look like English characters and numbers with variations*, have not shown up anywhere. They do not resemble Egyptian in the slightest.



While we have found external references to the Bible characters, we find no references anywhere to any character in the Book of Mormon. There is simply no external evidence to support the Book of Mormon. In 2016, with great fanfare, the Church announced that they would be performing excavations in Oman, where they hoped to find archeological evidence supporting the Book of Mormon. They acknowledged that following the route outlined in the Book of Mormon, present-day Oman must be the land of “Bountiful” described by the prophet Nephi; indeed, it was the only place in that area that could match the geographical description given by Joseph. After the announcement and years of looking, there has been a deafening silence as there is still absolutely no archeological evidence to support the Book of Mormon narrative.

Pearl of Great Price

For me, this was the smoking gun that really made me take a step back and question the faith of my childhood as a whole. As indicated in this book, it never made logical sense that the plates were taken away. They would have given conclusive proof that Joseph was who he said he was. Of course, if they were discovered to have been made out of tin and have incomprehensible chicken scratch on them, then he

would have been found out as a false prophet and his legacy would have gone nowhere.

Such is the case with the Book of Abraham.

As stated above, the Book of Abraham was purportedly translated by Joseph Smith from an Egyptian papyrus. There were images/facsimiles in the scrolls that were copied into The Book of Abraham and “translated” by Joseph Smith. Originally, the papyrus and the other artifacts that were purchased were thought to be lost. However, in 1967, the fragments were found by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and were returned to the Church. Below is a picture of the papyri that is in the Church’s possession and includes the drawn in portions, where those involved in the translation process guessed as to what the missing portions should have looked like.



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⁵⁵ This image is in the public domain and is available at:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Abraham#/media/File:Joseph_Smith_Papyrus_I.jpg.

Unfortunately for the Church, the “translation” by Joseph Smith, it turned out, had nothing to do with the language on the scrolls. The Church admits this. Currently on their website, they state “None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham.”⁵⁶

Despite acknowledging this, the Church still insists it to be true. The Church attempts to draw out some similarities between the writings of Joseph and the ancient world at the time, however, for me, none of it was satisfactory. They also claim an alternative theory, that perhaps Joseph’s study of the papyri “may have led to a revelation about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham, much as he had earlier received a revelation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible.”⁵⁷

In other words, the scroll was merely a catalyst that then inspired a revelation, and there was no actual translation at all. However, I just could not find this, or any of the alternative theories, remotely palatable. Joseph was either a prophet, or he was not, and in this case, he repeatedly affirmed that he *translated* these papyri. Thus, in my mind, this “revelation as opposed to translation” theory could not be viable. Could Joseph have been “tricked” into having a revelation? That is essentially this alternative theory proffered by the Church, because not once did Joseph ever claim that this was anything but a translation. In other words, for the Book of Abraham to be true, in order for it to be a revelation,

⁵⁶ Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham, Gospel Topical Essays, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>

⁵⁷ *Id.*

then it had to be given to Joseph Smith without him realizing that he was ever getting a revelation, which is an extraordinarily bizarre theory. Even the introductory portion of the Book still affirms that this was a translation!

Further, as you can see in the image above, when they received the papyri with the facsimiles, they had already been damaged with portions missing. Joseph and those assisting with the translation *drew in* the missing portions to complete the image. Below is the facsimile, where they drew in the missing portions identified in the papyri above.



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⁵⁸ This image is in the public domain, and is available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Abraham#/media/File:Abraham_Facsimile_1.png.

However, very similar scrolls (many of them) have since been found, and can be compared to the Joseph Smith Papyri, and we can see that they drew in the damaged portions incorrectly. Below is just one of many, many similar copies that have been found elsewhere in Egypt.



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Thus, they improperly drew in a dagger where it should have been a bird, and they drew in the face of a man, when it should have been the head of a jackal. This clearly led to the improper guesswork “translation” that was performed. Not to mention every single character and image on this facsimile was identified incorrectly in the interpretation of the facsimile itself by Joseph Smith.

The Book of Abraham begins its story with Abraham allegedly being put on an alter by an Egyptian priest by the name of Elkenah who was attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice.⁶⁰ Logic indicates this is clearly a fabrication based upon his reliance on an improperly completed papyri fragment. In other words, Joseph saw someone on a table and

⁵⁹ This image is available, along with greater analysis, on Mormon Think, <http://www.mormonthink.com/book-of-abraham-issues.htm>.

⁶⁰ Pearl of Great Price, 1:7.

someone above him with a dagger, and created a story about someone important being sacrificed.

To reiterate my point, during a conversation with a relative discussing this dilemma and trying to explain why this “revelation instead of translation” theory didn’t make any sense, perhaps by inspiration, I came up with the story of the Scroll of Bob.

Here is my analogy. I realize it is absurd, but I hope it drives home the point.

Bear with me for a moment.

Perhaps one day you are out in the woods excavating for some unknown reason and you happen upon an ancient papyrus with the following image.



Clearly, the person who created this image is an artist of the highest caliber. Regardless, you see this language, you do not know what it is about and so you take it to a friend, Jim. Jim looks at it and says, “Ah, yes I know this. It is an ancient text about a kid named Bob. You see, Bob had a birthday party, and there were lots of balloons. You can see the balloons and

the balloon strings behind him. He was given a gift of marbles, as you can see in his hand. He was not happy that he got marbles. It was a sad birthday.”

“Wow,” you think. Jim is awesome. He totally translated this by inspiration or whatever.

However, a couple of years later another friend, Frank, who happens to be a linguist, is over at your house and he sees this scroll. You tell him that Jim translated it for you. You then describe his translation, and he laughs. He responds, “this has nothing to do with anyone named Bob.” Frank continues, “there is no birthday party going on here; those are not balloons and those aren’t marbles; this is a scroll of Akbhah, and it is just a recipe for making raisins.” He further explains, “you see, chef Akbhah is showing the raisins in his hand, and the balls behind him are depictions the sun rising and setting. The lines from the balls are not strings, but the heat from the sun. The language describes how to turn grapes into raisins with the sunlight.” In fact, then Frank pulls up a website showing dozens of pictures of extremely similar variations of the same thing, and confirms that all linguists and everyone who can translate that gibberish agrees that it is a recipe for raisins.

You’re a little peeved at your friend Jim, and you come to him and say, “Jim, why did you claim this was a scroll about a birthday party and a kid named Bob? We’ve confirmed that this has absolutely nothing to do with anything you said it did! You mistook raisins for marbles, and you mistook the sun for balloons and a birthday party! You mistook the heat from the sun as strings on the balloons. Did you just make this up?” “No,” Jim replies, “I must have been mistaken, this was actually a *revelation* about a kid named Bob, who had a birthday party with balloons, and got marbles and was upset

about it.” “Even though I was entirely mistaken by the papyrus, this is totally a true revelation. Totally.”

Come on.

Needless to say, you would not believe his desperate attempt at saving face.

Just like Jim, Joseph relied on a picture that was improperly drawn in and came up with a story entirely fabricated based on that image. There is simply no way to logically get around this. This affirmatively shoots down the Church’s other reluctant explanation: that there was more of the scroll that has not been recovered. Even if there were more of the scroll, which there is no actual evidence of, Joseph clearly got everything wrong with the scroll that we *do* have. He based his entire “translation” on a misinterpreted and improperly completed diagram.

Conclusion

Weighing the evidence, I could no longer accept the Church’s history as accurate. I know many of my friends who left the Church have felt the same way. In all honesty, I felt a little cheated. I suspect you may as well. As you can see by comparing chapters 1 and 2, the clean-cut version of events as presented by the Church are fraught with inconsistencies that the Church would rather not discuss. Although the Church has, in recent years, presented essays to attempt to justify, explain, or argue against the contradictions, I personally felt the answers provided by the Church were less than satisfactory.

But do not take my word for it. I invite you to look into the Church’s answers for yourself, which are available on the churchofjesuschrist.org website, but I believe you will come to the same conclusion.

However, do not give up hope. Not everything you've been fed is untrue. You have the Bible and, as we will see later, there is so much truth in there. Christ is real and what he did for you and me is real.

Please bear with me as we continue this journey together.

Chapter 3: Journey Continued

What you have read is just a taste of the many, many issues with the very foundational doctrines and events in the Mormon Church. If you are not convinced, I would highly recommend “An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins” by Grant Palmer, as he provides significantly greater detail and addresses the many other concerns with the Mormon Church’s complicated history.

Regardless, at this point in my struggle with faith, after discovering just a few of these foundational issues, I seriously questioned the Church.

I was not immediately ready to jump ship, but the thought was constantly festering in my mind. However, my concerns about what was *outside* the Church kept me onboard, at least for a time. What would I do if I left? My entire identity was wrapped up with the Church. How would family and friends react? Plus, I thought, couldn’t the Church correct itself and get back on track? In other words, although there may have been some mistakes, perhaps some lies, which existed in the first decade or so of the Church, couldn’t the Church correct course and be on the proper track now? It is surely unrealistic to expect every major character in Church history to be flawless. Further, I thought, “we have modern prophets who teach good, God-fearing principles, and much of their teachings help people to live better lives and be better people. Isn’t that a sign that the Church has corrected its course and is, at least quietly, pushing away the practices and mistakes of the past?”

Plus, I had so many additional hang-ups which kept me *in* the Church.

For example, I was brought up believing there must be authority from God to be a true church. To my knowledge, there were only two churches that claimed direct authority from God: the Mormons and the Catholics. In my mind, Catholicism was so far from Christianity that it was never an option. So, what about authority? No one can just start up a church, baptize people, or act in the name of God without authority, right?

One of the other biggest hinderances to my leaving the Church was the lack of good options out there. I had grown up learning about the incorrect doctrines taught by other “Christians,” and most of them seemed so far-fetched that I could not fathom going that route. For example, many Christians think they are saved by grace, by a little prayer to Jesus. Is it really that simple? The thought was absurd. Further, there were those other bizarre Christian doctrines like the Trinity. A schizophrenic God? I do not think so.

“So maybe I’ll stick with the Church a little longer,” I thought... “look a little further in time.” For me, the Church I knew, the Church I attended, even though it may have had a bizarre past, did not seem so weird. Yes, there were some things in history like the bizarre foundational issues described, but the Church, at least on its face, seemed to correct its course and was not a church believing in “hobgoblins” and buried treasure. It had to get better after Joseph Smith, right?

Continuing the Journey

The next few chapters may feel a little disjointed, but I want to walk you through my journey as it happened, which was not always in the most organized way. However, in talking with others who are making this journey, it often happens in a very similar fashion. The steps tend to be as follows:

1. First, you find out about Mormon History. You seriously question your faith and begin questioning everything you have been taught.
2. Second, you desperately find something so you can hold onto the Church. You think that maybe the Church is on track now. Indeed, the Church is not nearly as weird as it was back then, so you hope, for a while, that the Church is still true, even if it wasn't *exactly* true back then. It may be illogical if you step back and think about that, but it still goes through your mind.
3. Third, you likely come to the decision that the Church is probably not true, and really never was true, so now you wonder if there is any truth out there. You are extremely hesitant to go anywhere else, however, because you are afraid that you're just going to be fed a bunch of unsupported stories. You still have the same skepticism of other churches that you had growing up in the Church, believing that they are all false and that their "creeds were an abomination." Plus, you believe there can only be one true church, if there is a true church at all. It just makes sense, doesn't it? You cannot have two churches teaching two different things and them both still be true, right? One must be true, one must have authority, and all the rest are false...right? These are the thoughts that race through your head and keep you in limbo for a long time.
4. Fourth, you make a step. You might leave the Church, abandon Christianity and religion all together and just live your life however you deem best. You figure the truth just cannot be

known and you have a sincere distrust of any organized religion, so your spiritual journey ends. Alternatively, like I did, you look into the past, look for the moments where you can't deny God was in your life, recognize the perpetual emptiness that this world has to offer, and you start looking for the truth.

These were the next several steps of my journey and I hope to walk through each of these with you. We have already passed step one, and now I was in step two, trying to figure out if the current Church was true (enough).

Did we get back on track after Joseph Smith?

Chapter 4: Not-So Course Correction

At this point in my journey I was a little desperate. No, not a little; I was desperate.

I did not believe in the very foundations of the Church. However, the Church I was currently attending seemed like a “normal” Church to me at this point in my life, and I hoped that maybe the Church was back on track. In other words, maybe Joseph Smith got the authority from God, and *then* he ran amok until his death, but now the Church had got itself back in line and was teaching largely true principles. I attempted to disregard the varying accounts of the First Vision and thought that perhaps Joseph still had been given authority from God and restored some truths, even if he did not remain true and faithful during the rest of his life. He went apostate, but not until after he had done the things God wanted him to do. Because he had received that authority, and he gave that authority to others, the Church could still be true and with authority, even if Joseph did not remain true.

Looking back now, I can see how illogical this line of thinking was.

When preparing for law school, I took a lot of practice tests for the LSAT (Law School Admissions Test) and I always scored very high on the logic portions of the test. I might have waived on one of the other sections (I sucked at the games section), but I knew I could fly through all of the logic portions of the test without any problem. However, at this point in my life, I was desperate; I was not thinking logically. There was too much emotion tied up with the Church, that the very thought of abandoning everything I knew was not going to come easy, and I was stretching to find reasons to stick with the Church.

If you're reading this book and still going to the Church, I suspect you're in the same position. You don't want to leave. You want to find something to grasp on to so that you can justify continued membership.

As I am about to explain with specific examples, the Church never corrected course. Unfortunately, if the Church was off course during the life of Joseph Smith, it got even worse with Brigham Young.

So, let us get started with Brigham Young.

Brigham Young

I started with the next prophet in line, and arguably the first prophet of the modern Mormon Church (considering the split after Joseph's death). It probably took less than a couple of hours to for me personally to conclude that Brigham Young was not a prophet. After doing minimal research into Brigham Young using the Church's own materials, I was shocked that I had never known really *anything* about him the entire time I was an active Mormon. I had just blindly trusted that he was a prophet, figured that God had some reasons for putting him in charge, figured there was some justification for polygamy, and left it at that. I suspect many Mormons have had the same mentality.

Using books that you can purchase directly from the Church, and reading his own words, you can easily see how far Brigham Young strayed from anything resembling the Christianity you know. Most of the information I provide hereafter is directly from the Journal of Discourses. Plus, as we began dealing with Brigham Young, we must deal with polygamy. I have tried to analyze this as impartially as possible and used only the scriptures (including the Mormon scriptures) to address the issue. As you will see below, the Church went only further and further away from traditional

Christianity and even common decency after Brigham Young took the helm.

When it comes to Brigham Young, it is unfortunate that the Church only takes small quotations from him and select portions of his history to make public to its members. To be fair, the Church has not tried to *hide* his actions or bizarre teachings, it just does not bring them up. They do not show up in the Elders' Quorum manual, nor is such information in any Sunday School handout. His is kind of an enigma in the Church, and you really only know some random quotes and that the universities are named after him. And quite honestly, his teachings are so bizarre, they *should not* be in any manual or guide that others might look to for guidance or direction.

I began by looking into the Journal of Discourses, which you can pick up at any Deseret Book or online from the Church. Even better, you can buy the Kindle version for a few bucks if you want to read these quotes for yourself.

I think the easiest way to give you a good idea of what kind of person the early Mormon saints were dealing with regarding Brigham Young is to just give you a long excerpt from just one of his "discourses" to the Church. Here is a discourse directed to the women of the Church, who were quite unhappy with polygamy. This was delivered on September 21, 1856. I have not included the entire discourse for the simple sake of space-constraints, but there have been no changes or selective editing to the text. The grammatical errors are in the original.

Now for my proposition; it is more particularly for my sisters, as it is frequently happening that women say they are unhappy. Men will say, "My wife, though a most

excellent woman, has not seen a happy day since I took my second wife,” “No, not a happy day for a year,” says one; and another has not seen a happy day for five years. It is said that women are tied down and abused: that they are misused and have not the liberty they ought to have; that many of them are wading through a perfect flood of tears...

I wish my own women to understand that what I am going to say is for them as well as others, and I want those who are here to tell their sisters, yes, all the women of this community, and then write it back to the States, and do as you please with it. I am going to give you from this time to the 6th day of October next, for reflection, that you may determine whether you wish to stay with your husbands or not, and then I am going to set every woman at liberty and say to them, Now go your way, my women with the rest, go your way. And my wives have got to do one of two things; either round up their shoulders to endure the afflictions of this world, and live their religion, or they may leave, for I will not have them about me. I will go into heaven alone, rather than have scratching and fighting around me. I will all at liberty. “What, first wife too?” Yes, I will liberate you all.

I wish my women, and brother Kimball’s and brother Grant’s to leave, and every woman in this Territory, or else say in their hearts that they will embrace the Gospel - the whole of it....say to your wives, ‘Take all that I have and be set at liberty; but if you stay

with me you shall comply with the law of God, and that too without any murmuring and whining. You must fulfil the law of God in every respect, and round up your shoulders to walk up to the mark without any grunting. Now recollect that two weeks from to morrow I am going to set you at liberty. But the first wife will say, "It is hard, for I have lived with my husband twenty years, or thirty, and have raised a family of children for him, and it is a great trial to me for him to have more women"; then I say it is time that you gave him up to other women who will bear children. If my wife had borne me all the children that she ever would bare, the celestial law would teach me to take young women that would have children....

Sisters, I am not joking, I do not throw out my proposition to banter your feelings, to see whether you will leave your husbands, all or any of you. But I know that there is no cessation to the everlasting whining of many of the women in this territory; I am satisfied that this is the case. And if the women will turn from the commandments of God and continue to despise the order of heaven, I will pray that the curse of the Almighty may be close to their heels, and that it may be following them all the day long....

Prepare yourselves for two weeks from tomorrow; and I will tell you now, that if you will tarry with your husbands, after I have set you free, you must bow down to it, and submit yourselves to the celestial law. You may go where you please, after two weeks from to-

morrow; but, remember, that I will not hear any more of this whining.⁶¹

After reading this passage, certainly like the women who heard it that day, I was shocked and horrified. These were not the words of a saint. These were not the words of God. This was not a prophet. Brigham was proclaiming that he had the power to “set every woman at liberty” so they could leave their husbands if they were unhappy. He ridiculed the women for rightfully being miserable while their husbands were out having relations with young girls. He declared that this is the Gospel: once his wife became old and infertile, it was his *duty* to marry and procreate with younger women. Considering he had over 50 wives, he did just that.

It boggles my mind that any woman (or decent man) would continue to follow him after just this speech alone, except for the fact they had isolated themselves from the rest of civilization by marching out to Utah and had little choice at this point. Did the women really have an option to just trudge back across the largely unpopulated areas of United States to escape this environment? There was no option for them; it was truly for them to “endure” their religion.

OK, so he said some crazy things one time, right? This was just an excerpt, probably the worst example of anything Brigham Young taught, and we cannot expect perfection out of human beings, right? This went through my head and it may be going through yours.

Well, I had wished that were the case.

Maybe if he had had an off day, maybe I could ignore this. However, if you read the Journal of Discourses as well as

⁶¹ (Sermon by Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4., pp. 55-57; also printed in Deseret News, Vol. 6, pp. 235-236).

other documents available, the heresies got worse and worse, and spanned the duration of his reign. Here are just a few examples involving Brigham Young and the other leaders at the time. These are all direct quotes from the Journal of Discourses.

- Heber C. Kimball, one of the two counselors to Brigham Young at the time of the succession and move to Utah, taught that Brigham Young and his counselors held the power over an individual's salvation, and no one would make it to heaven unless they said so. Who needs Jesus, right?
 - There is a spirit of murmuring among the people, and the fault is laid upon brother Brigham. For this reason the heavens are closed against you, *for he [Brigham] holds the keys of life and salvation upon the earth*; and you may strive as much as you please, but *not one of you will ever go through the strait gate into the kingdom of God, except those that go through by that man and his brethren*, for they will be the persons whose inspection you must pass. I tell you this plain truth, and you may do what you think best with it.⁶²
- Brigham Young and his presidency taught “blood atonement” on many occasions, claiming that murder was justifiable for certain sins, and that the shedding of blood was even *necessary* for the sake of the salvation of the wicked. According to Brigham, the atonement of Christ was insufficient

⁶² A Discourse by President Heber C. Kimball, November 2, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 4 p. 64.

for all sins, some of which required the death of the sinner.

- Suppose you found your brother in bed with your wife, and put a javelin through both of them, *you would be justified, and they would atone for their sins, and be received into the kingdom of God.* I would at once do so in such a case; and under such circumstances, I have no wife whom I love so well that I would not put a javelin through her heart, and I would do it with clean hands... There is not a man or woman, who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. *The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it;* and the judgments of the Almighty will come, sooner or later, and every man and woman will have to atone for breaking their covenants.⁶³
- I say, there are men and women that I would advise to go to the Presidency immediately, and ask him to appoint a committee to attend to their care; and then let a place be selected, and *let that committee shed their blood.* We have amongst us that are full of all manner of abominations, *those who need to have their blood shed, for water will not do, their sins are too deep a dye...* I believe that there are a great many; and if they are covenant

⁶³ A Discourse by Brigham Young, March 16, 1856, Journal of Discourses Vol. 3.

breakers we need a place designated, where we can shed their blood... Brethren and sisters, we want you to repent and forsake your sins. And *you who have committed sins that cannot be forgiven through baptism, let your blood be shed*, and let the smoke ascend, that the incense thereof may come up before God as an atonement for your sins, and that the sinners in Zion may be afraid.⁶⁴

- When will we love our neighbour as ourselves? In the first place, Jesus said that no man hateth his own flesh. It is admitted by all that every person loves himself. Now if we do rightly love ourselves, we want to be saved and continue to exist, we want to go into the kingdom where we can enjoy eternity and see no more sorrow nor death. This is the desire of every person who believes in God. Now take a person in this congregation who has knowledge with regard to being saved in the kingdom of our God and our Father, and being exalted, one who knows and understands the principles of eternal life, and sees the beauty and excellency of the eternities before him compared with the vain and foolish things of the world, and suppose that he is overtaken in a gross fault, that *he has committed a sin that he knows will deprive him of that exaltation which he desires, and that he cannot attain to it without the*

⁶⁴ A Discourse by Jedediah Grant, 2nd Counselor to Brigham Young, September 21, 1856, Journal of Discourses Vol. 4, pp. 49-51.

shedding of his blood, and also knows that by having his blood shed he will atone for that sin, and be saved and exalted with the Gods, is there a man or woman in this house but what would say, "shed my blood that I may be saved and exalted with the Gods?" All mankind love themselves, and let these principles be known by an individual, and he would be glad to have his blood shed. That would be loving themselves, even unto an eternal exaltation. Will you love your brothers or sisters likewise, when they have committed a sin that cannot be atoned for without the shed[d]ing of their blood? Will you love that man or woman well enough to shed their blood?

That is what Jesus Christ meant. He never told a man or woman to love their enemies in their wickedness, never. He never intended any such thing; his language is left as it is for those to read who have the Spirit to discern between truth and error; it was so left for those who can discern the things of God. Jesus Christ never meant that we should love a wicked man in his wickedness...I could refer you to plenty of instances where men have been righteously slain, in order to atone for their sins. I have seen scores and hundreds of people for whom there would have been a chance (in the last resurrection there will be) if their lives had been taken and their blood spilled on the ground as a smoking incense to the

Almighty, but who are now angels to the devil, until our elder brother Jesus Christ raises them up—conquers death, hell, and the grave. *I have known a great many men who have left this Church for whom there is no chance whatever for exaltation, but if their blood had been spilled, it would have been better for them.* The wickedness and ignorance of the nations forbid this principle's being in full force, but the time will come when the law of God will be in full force. *This is loving our neighbour as ourselves; if he needs help, help him; and if he wants salvation and it is necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he may be saved, spill it. Any of you who understand the principles of eternity, if you have sinned a sin requiring the shedding of blood, except the sin unto death, would not be satisfied nor rest until your blood should be spilled, that you might gain that salvation you desire. That is the way to love mankind.* ⁶⁵ ⁶⁶

- Brigham Young taught that Adam was God the Father, who had a host of wives.

⁶⁵ A Discourse by Brigham Young, February 8, 1857, Journal of Discourses Vol. 4, p. 219-220.

⁶⁶ As an additional note, one can easily see from this passage that Brigham Young is advocating murder for those who commit sins, including leaving the Mormon Church. According to Brigham, it would be better for them to die so they can have their sins atoned by their own blood. I do not believe it is any coincidence that the “Mountain Meadows Massacre” occurred just seven months later on September 11, 1857 that results in the murder of 120 men, women and children.

- Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, *one of his wives*, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is Michael, the Archangel, the ancient of days about whom holy men have written and spoken – *He is our father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do*. Every man upon the earth, professing Christians or non-professing, must hear it, and will know it sooner or later!⁶⁷
- You believe Adam was made of the dust of this earth. This I do not believe, though it is supposed that it is so written in the Bible; but it is not to my understanding. You can write that information to the States, if you please – that I have publicly declared that I do not believe that portion of the Bible as the Christian world do. I never did, and I never want to. What is the reason I do not? Because I have come to understanding, and banished from my mind all the baby stories my mother taught me when I was a child.⁶⁸
- *How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me –*

⁶⁷ A Discourse by Brigham Young, April 9, 1852, Journal of Discourses Vol. 1, p. 51.

⁶⁸ A Discourse by Brigham Young, October 23, 1853, Journal of Discourses Vol. 2, p. 6.

namely that Adam is our father and God – I do not know, I do not inquire, I care nothing about it. Our Father Adam helped to make this earth, it was created expressly for him, and after it was made he and his companions came here. He brought one of his wives with him, and she was called Eve, because she was the first woman upon the earth. Our Father Adam is the man who stands at the gate and holds the keys of everlasting life and salvation to all his children who have or who ever will come upon the earth. I have been found fault with by the ministers of religion because I have said that they were ignorant. But I could not find any man on the earth who could tell me this, although it is one of the simplest things in the world, until I met and talked with Joseph Smith.⁶⁹

Again, this is just an extremely *small* sample of some of the bizarre teachings of Brigham Young and his counselors. If you do some research, or just read the Journal of Discourses, which is 26 volumes long, you'll find enough pages of bizarre, non-Christian (even anti-Christian) teachings to assure you that a righteous God had nothing to do with the teachings of this man.

Polygamy

So, we have already shown that the foundational doctrines were incorrect, that Brigham Young went completely astray from anything that could be arguably considered Christian, why even discuss polygamy? Why not

⁶⁹ Brigham Young, Deseret News, v. 22, no. 308, June 8, 1873.

just stop and move on? You said you were going to see whether the Church corrected course after Joseph Smith, why are you going back in time?

Well, for several reasons.

First, the Church *today* still believes D&C 132, the chapter concerning polygamy, is true scripture from God. Second, the Church still practices spiritual polygamy. In other words, the Church still believes that polygamy is an eternal principle, although it is not currently practiced on the earth. This was a realization I came to while still an active member of the Church.

Let me explain.

After returning from my mission, I was naïve and, well, pretty stupid. I was also a 21-year old with hormones. I got married much quicker than I should have and the marriage I was in was not a happy marriage for either of us. I believe it was somewhere around two years after my return from my mission that I got married, and then two years later I was divorced. It was not until I met my current wife that I realized that the Church continues to seal multiple women to one man. When I was getting ready to get married again, I needed to get clearance from the top of the Church hierarchy before I could be cleared to marry in the temple with another woman. I recall sitting there with my bishop at the time and asking if I could just get a temple divorce, so I would not have to still be sealed to my first wife. I did not want us to show up on some paper together as husband and wife. I was informed that the Church does not do it that way; I just need a clearance, but my ex and I would still technically be sealed since we were married in the temple. In other words, I would now be sealed to two women, and be essentially involved in spiritual polygamy.

On the other hand, when a close female relative of mine got divorced and wanted to remarry in the temple, she had to go the route of getting a temple divorce. In other words, she had to get the First Presidency to allow her to be divorced, because a woman could not be sealed to two men, but a man could be sealed to two women.

So, to make a short story much longer than necessary, this is why I believe addressing polygamy is necessary for the analysis as to the course correction of the Church. Among all of the breakoffs from the original Church, the only church that actually practiced polygamy or believed that such was from God, is the current Utah-based Mormon Church. Because of this, one could argue that the current founder of the Utah-based Mormon church *is* Brigham Young.

Finally, the issue of polygamy is likely an issue lingering in the back of the minds of virtually every Church member. Frankly, most Mormons come up with an excuse for it; they know it is wrong, but it is “gospel” according to the Church, so they try to reconcile this in their minds. They think, “well, the Lord commanded it for a time so the Church could be built up.” In other words, polygamy and young marriages led to more children, which led to more servants in the Church. Another line I have frequently heard is that “we just don’t understand the mind of the Lord, so we just need to accept the fact that polygamy happened, that the Lord ended it after a time, and we do not have to deal with it today.” I know as a missionary for the Church, I could never come up with a good excuse for it. I would just say that it “was commanded by God for a time, is no more, and hasn’t been practiced for over a hundred years.”

I have also found that most people are woefully ignorant of the actual doctrine of polygamy found in the Doctrine and Covenants. For my entire active Mormon life, I

was one of those. I can honestly say that maybe I had skimmed D&C 132 at some point in my life, but I never actually analyzed it to determine what it said or if anything rang untrue. However, once you *actually* read it, it is so filled with mistakes and contradictions that you know, without relying on anything else, that this entire doctrine is false.

So, let us jump into it, read the actual language from the “revelation,” and analyze it with what we know about God.

Regarding polygamy, according to the Church website, it states:

Latter-day Saints believe that monogamy—the marriage of one man and one woman—is the Lord’s standing law of marriage. In biblical times, the Lord commanded some of His people to practice plural marriage—the marriage of one man and more than one woman. Some early members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also received and obeyed this commandment given through God’s prophets.⁷⁰

First, before we even get into the actual language of the “scripture,” the Church’s position is untenable. It proclaims monogamy as the “standing” law of the Lord, which would be consistent with an unchanging, unwavering God, supported by the Bible. But the very next line it contradicts this, claiming that God, *at times, commanded* people to take multiple wives. The Church cites to Genesis 16 as a “commandment” from the Lord to commit polygamy. In Genesis 16, there is no

⁷⁰ Plural Marriage, Foundations of the Restoration Teacher Manual, p. 225, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/foundations-of-the-restoration-teacher-manual/lesson-20-plural-marriage?lang=eng>.

commandment for such. In the Bible, polygamy seems to have always been the result of a lack of faith, deception, lust, or direct disobedience, and certainly never a commandment of God.

In reading Section 132, the section ordaining plural marriage, the Church uses its *own* scripture to justify the statement that there was a “commandment” for Abraham to take multiple wives. D&C 132:34: “God commanded Abraham, and Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham to wife. And why did she do it? Because this was the law; and from Hagar sprang many people. This, therefore, was fulfilling, among other things, the promises.” Verse 35 continues, “Was Abraham, therefore, under condemnation? Verily I say unto you, Nay; for I, the Lord, commanded it.”

I need to reiterate what this says. According to this section, God *commanded* Sarah to give Abraham her handmaid and he was, in turn, *commanded* to sleep with her. This sounds exactly like the Mormon practice of polygamy.

Let’s look at the actual biblical account.

Genesis 16: God had promised him children as numerous as the stars in the heavens, but reaching an old age, his faith was perhaps wavering. He was old; his wife was old. Her faith was wavering faster than his it appears. Verse 1 (NIV): “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hager; so she said to Abram, ‘The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.’”

Clearly, this is not a command of the Lord; in fact, as any Christian would agree, it appears to be more a lack of faith that God was still going to keep his promise to Abraham. In fact, because of his apparent lack of faith, in Chapter 17 the

Lord again reminds Abraham that he will bless him with a child and will do so *through* Sarah.

However, before we get too far, we need to go back to D&C 132 and start at the beginning to go through and analyze the section in its entirety. The first verse reads as follows.

“Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines—”

While there are a lot of things to discuss in this section, right now we need to focus on this first verse. Allegedly, God told Joseph that he “justified” Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon regarding their multiple wives. The first problem with this verse is that, although Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, and *probably* Moses had multiple wives, *Isaac never did*. Thus, God is mistaken, or the biblical account is incorrect and he did take more wives, *or this was entirely made up by a man*.

There are entire essays about Isaac and his monogamy. Unlike his father and his son Jacob, Isaac remained entirely faithful to his one wife and is thus a “Christ-figure” of the Old Testament. Unlike both Abraham and Jacob who slept with the handmaids of their wives once their wives began having difficulty bearing children, Isaac prayed to God when his wife was barren and Rebekah became pregnant.⁷¹ Unlike Abraham and Jacob who had their names changed by God later in life, Isaac, like Jesus, was named by God before he was born.⁷²

⁷¹ Genesis 25:21.

⁷² Genesis 17:19.

Like Christ, Isaac was to be sacrificed by his father. Thus, the very first verse of this section is factually incorrect.

This is not the only mistake God allegedly made here. It mentions David here, and if we skip down to verse 39, supposedly the Lord says “David’s wives and concubines were given unto him of me, by the hand of Nathan, my servant, and others of the prophets who had the keys of this power; and in none of these things did he sin against me save in the case of Uriah.” First, this is not biblical. God may have *allowed* it, but there is nothing to support that Nathan served as some sort of pimp for David. (Sorry for the sarcasm.) Second, this actually contradicts the very words from the Church’s own other scripture, the Book of Mormon. In Jacob 2:24, the Lord says “Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.”

So...Were they given to him by the Lord or were they an abomination to the Lord... which Lord is speaking and when?

Regardless, if we review the Biblical accounts of polygamy, they were never endorsed by the Lord. Were they sins? That is a bit of a grey area. The Lord seems to have allowed polygamy. However, there is a big difference between allowing multiple wives and *commanding* one to take multiple wives. There are no commandments in the Bible for multiple wives, only against. In Deuteronomy 17:17, we read where the Lord gives instructions to the people once they enter into the promised land and appoint a king to rule over them. He lays down several rules, including that the king must not be a foreigner and also that “[h]e must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.” We saw this happen to both David and Solomon. Solomon was led away from the Lord due to his

significant harem and the pagan practices his concubines brought with them. David's biggest downfall was taking another wife, one that he should never have taken.

This is opposite of what we find in the Mormon scriptures though.

So, let us continue, having seen several probable errors already. Verse two continues: "Behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter." In other words, God is going to answer Joseph's inquiry into the justification of polygamy.

Verse three continues "prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed under them must obey the same."

Again, we have a lot of significant preparatory language. In essence, be prepared for the commandment I am going to give to you.

Verse four begins the real meat of the chapter, "I reveal unto you a new and everlasting covenant; and if you abide not in that covenant, then you are damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory." It then continues for about 10 verses with lots of extraneous language mingled with biblical phrases, before we come to verse 15. In verse 15 it reads, "if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world."

Verse 16 essentially says that for those who are married in the world and not by the Lord, they become

ministering servants “to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.” In other words, those who follow this new law as part of this “new and everlasting covenant” receive a much higher glory and are served by those who did not marry in this manner.

Verses 17 through 18 reiterate the same things, and verse 19 essentially says that those who do marry according to God’s word, so long as they do not shed innocent blood, they will become gods with all powers, dominions, priesthoods etc. The next few verses continue on in the same language mingled with phrases from the Bible before it goes on to explain the promises that Abraham received from the Lord.

In verse 30, “Abraham received promises concerning his seed, and the fruit of his loins—from whose loins ye are... Which were to continue so long as they were in the world.” Verse 31 through 32 reads as follows: “This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham, and the promise was made to Abraham; and by this law is the continuation of the works of my father, wherein he glorifies himself. Go ye, therefore, and do the works of Abraham (presumably polygamy); enter ye into my law and you shall be saved.”

Let us take a step back and think this through.

This section begins with the discussion of a “new and everlasting covenant” that was to be revealed to Joseph Smith. However, there is nothing “new” about polygamy, and that is where the next few verses go. After commanding Joseph to “do the works of Abraham” (polygamy) we then move on to verse 34 where God allegedly commanded Abraham and Sarah to give Hagar to be his wife. Verse 35 reads as follows: “Was Abraham, therefore, under condemnation? Verily I say unto you, Nay; for I, the Lord, commanded it.” Verse 36 reads “Abraham was commanded to offer his son Isaac;

nevertheless, it was written: Thou shalt not kill. Abraham, however, did not refuse, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness.”

Verse 37 reads: “Abraham received concubines and they bore him children; and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, because they were given to him and he abode in my law; as Isaac and also Jacob did none other things than that which they were commanded; because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation according to the promises, and sit upon the throne’s, and are not angels but are gods.”

Let us recap.

There is this “new and everlasting covenant” that is essentially polygamy, and is frankly really, really old – Abraham was doing it long before Christ. Others were doing it long before him. If you disagree that plural marriage was really the same thing as celestial marriage mentioned here in D&C 132, let us just jump to that discourse we read earlier from Brigham Young.

“But the first wife will say, ‘It is hard, for I have lived with my husband twenty years, or thirty, and have raised a family of children for him, and it is a great trial to me for him to have more women’; then I say it is time that you gave him up to other women who will bear children. If my wife had borne me all the children that she ever would bare, *the celestial law would teach me to take young women that would have children.*”⁷³ Further, we are told to “do the works of Abraham.” Abraham did not go into a temple and get married. Indeed, the only work of Abraham identified in this entire section is following his wife by sharing in her lack of faith and taking an additional wife. Thus, it is very clear, God is

⁷³ Journal of Discourses, 4:53, Brigham Young, September 21, 1856.

supposedly telling Joseph that everyone has to commit polygamy in order to inherit Celestial glory and return to the presence of God. And Joseph needs to continue in “the law,” which sounds a lot like Old Testament legalism.

There is an interesting comparison here, pointing out that although the law said “thou shalt not kill,” Abraham was commanded to offer up his son as a sacrifice, which was contrary to that law, and this was somehow righteousness. In other words, they are using the example of Abraham and Isaac to essentially say that although you are not supposed to commit adultery, *not only can you, but you are supposed to when the Lord tells you to do it*, and it will be righteousness for you. This is a new and everlasting covenant.

There are a lot of potential problems in these verses.

First, again, the Lord forgets that Isaac did not commit polygamy. Although he does not necessarily say this in these later passages, it is implied.

Second, the official command of “thou shalt not kill” as written on the stone tablets was an event that occurred long after the life of Abraham.

Third, there is a bizarre comparison between Abraham being told to sacrifice his only son and Joseph being told to “do the works of Abraham” by marrying lots of women. The story of Abraham and Isaac is a beautiful parallel and foreshadowing to the Father sacrificing his son, Jesus Christ, for the sins of the world. There was significant sacrifice by both the Father and the Son and there was no worldly pleasure to be gained, only eternal salvation for those who accept the Son. It seems a little far-fetched, even blasphemous, that God, the one who sacrificed his own Son, would compare his own beautiful sacrificial symbolism to “commanding” a man to marry lots of women.

Fourth, the works of Abraham were never accredited to him as righteousness, it was his *faith* in trusting the Lord, that the Lord would bless him with offspring. Paul makes this clear in Galatians 3:3-8 (NIV):

“Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? ... So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith ... So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

The “works” of Abraham were never credited as righteousness, especially his sleeping with his handmaids. This is entirely un-biblical and contrary to scripture. Further, ironically, the only later time that the Sarah/Hagar event is mentioned in the Bible is to compare the old law with the actual true new covenant: Jesus Christ. Galatians 4:21-23 (NIV) reads, “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.”

Clearly, this specifically contradicts what is found in D&C. The God in the D&C tells Joseph Smith that this giving

of Hagar to Abraham as a wife, and his bearing of children, was part of the “new and everlasting covenant.” Paul says it was of the flesh; the “divine promise” was through Sarah, not Hagar.

Continuing, verse 24 through 26 reads:

These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother... Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Again, Hagar and the birth of Ishmael represents the old law, children who are born as slaves without a savior. There is no “new and everlasting covenant” here. Section 132 seems to attempt to reiterate the law and ignore our Savior, and not only that, but implement a law that is evil and inconsistent with the law originally given by God.

Let us finish with Galatians verses 29 through 31 (NIV). Verse 29 reads, “At that time the son born according to the flesh (Ishmael) persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit (Isaac).” Again, this seems to affirm that there is nothing spiritual, nothing holy, about Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham; it is “according to the flesh.”

Finally, “But what does Scripture say? ‘Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.’ Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”

Indeed, if we want to seek the Lord, if we want salvation, we can never find it under any law, ritual, or ordinance; we can only find it through Christ.

Conclusion

After reading through D&C 132 and after reading through many of the false teachings of Brigham Young, I had no choice but to acknowledge that there was no way that the Church was true. The very foundational stories regarding how the church started, and the first 50 years or so all demonstrate to prove this. However, I still had to wrestle with the far-fetched idea that maybe, just maybe, the Church had *later* corrected course. The Church doesn't practice polygamy today. The Church seems to have quietly abandoned the Adam-God theory, blood atonement, and many of the other insane teachings of Brigham Young. I thought, perhaps, maybe we were on the right track finally?

I think, arguably, the Church *has* corrected course in some degree. I believe the Church has embraced more traditional Christian teachings, perhaps quietly, over the last few decades. The Church has at least quietly distanced itself from some of the bizarre teachings and actions of Brigham Young. However, the Church has yet to refute **any** of its previous doctrines. The Church has not denied that polygamy was never instituted of God, indeed, it teaches that it was a commandment. The Church still practices spiritual polygamy. The Church has never denied that Brigham Young taught many bizarre and incorrect doctrines and that he was, clearly, never a prophet of God. The Church has never taken any affirmative action to distance itself from the messy past. Indeed, it cannot make that assertion, for he is the one who led the Church out to Utah, and he is the arguable founder of the current Church.

Last I checked, there is still a university in Utah (and Idaho and Hawaii) after the name of Brigham Young.

Chapter 5: Apostasy and Authority

At this point in my journey I was stuck. I did not believe in the Church any longer, because the doctrines and very foundations of the Church just did not make sense, and indeed, *could not* make sense. The history that I grew up with turned out to be, in many ways, a fabrication and the early leaders taught doctrines that were clearly anti-Christian. It could not be true. However, was there *any* truth out there? Did *any* church have the authority to be God's church on the earth?

Growing up in the Church there are two teachings that are seared into your mind: 1) there is only one true church, and 2) there must be authority from God in order to direct that church and perform the sacred ordinances in the church. When I would see nondenominational churches spring up, I always thought they were nothing more than glorified sources of entertainment. Maybe they had a good message, but there was no way they could be *God's* church. God established a church and that church had to be headed by authority and directly by people authorized from God... right? We could not just have people getting up and preaching; such is no more than feel good entertainment... right?

So, let us take a moment, take a breath, and pause.

At this point in our journey we need to discuss this line of thinking. I bring this issue up because it was such a huge hurdle for me, and it was so ingrained in my belief system that I was almost unwilling to even entertain anything to the contrary. It seemed so common-sensical, that I had a hard time even fathoming otherwise.

We need to address the "Great Apostasy," and this authority as presented by the Church. Before I could really move on in my journey to seek truth, I had to have these two

issues addressed. Looking at all of the churches around me, I had to believe that there was an apostasy – there had been a dramatic straying from the truth. Looking at the differences between the Catholic Church and the differing protestant churches out there, someone was wrong. Additionally, I had to have the authority issue satisfied. It was so ingrained in me that the concept of churches just springing up seemed preposterous. They did not have the right to do so. They did not have the *authority* to do so.

Or did they?

Usually before a child in the Church can read, they are going to the pulpit during fast and testimony meeting and bearing their “testimony” that they “know the church is true,” and that they “know Joseph Smith was a prophet.” This becomes fixed in them as children. It was fixed in me. Church youth leaders are often reinforcing such behaviors by the repeated bearing of their own testimonies. Often Church leaders and workers end their lessons by bearing their own testimonies, often repeating the same phrases as these.

So, where does the concept of this one “true church” come from?

This phrase began and continued with Joseph Smith. As identified earlier, the official First Vision account condemns all other churches. According to Mormonism, every other church and its creeds were an “abomination” before God. Indeed, as recounted earlier, God told Joseph that the professors of these denominations were “corrupt,” and eventually He would “restore” the one true church through Joseph Smith. Indeed, this is further reiterated by ongoing church doctrine of the apostasy. Growing up Mormon these were very familiar themes: every church had gone astray,

become apostate, and the authority was taken from the earth. The authority was later restored through Joseph Smith.

Background

Before we get too deep here, we need to do a little history lesson. As a disclaimer, I am not a historian. I can read history and regurgitate what I understand, but I am not a historian by schooling or trade, so if there is anything inaccurate in my religious historical summary below, I sincerely apologize.

It is not difficult to see that much of the Catholic Church resembles very little of what we find in the Bible. In fact, I would argue, the current church is actually slightly closer to biblical Christianity today than it was during the time of Martin Luther. Martin Luther, as you may know, was ordained to the Catholic priesthood in 1507. Over the next decade, he would dispute many of the practices of the Catholic church that were extraordinarily anti-Christian, including the use of indulgences, which were essentially things that could be obtained through works or prayers (or purchases) in order to “reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for sins.”⁷⁴

A few years ago, I spent four nights in Rome, touring the city and learning about the country and more about the history of the Roman Catholic Church. I also spent time in Greece, and it amazed me how plainly you could see the adoption of pagan practices by the Roman Catholic Church. One of the stunning architectural features I saw all over Rome were these massive obelisks with Egyptian writings inscribed on them. In fact, there were at least eight obelisks that were imported directly from Egypt, and several others that had been

⁷⁴ Peters, Edward (2008). *A Modern Guide to Indulgences: Rediscovering This Often Misinterpreted Teaching*. p. 13.

manufactured in Rome to replicate those from Egypt. When researching the meaning, I found that the obelisks were largely associated with Ra, the Sun God, and solar worship. I could go into greater detail, but suffice to say, they were part of Egyptian worship practices, which had nothing to do with Christianity.

What I found fascinating is that for almost all of the obelisks I saw in Rome, which was supposed to be the epicenter of Christianity, they were all still standing (though now thousands of years old). Even though Rome adopted Christianity around 305 A.D., it kept its pagan symbols. Instead of knocking them down or moving them to an area as a museum, they plopped a cross on the top of them so now they were somehow *Christian* artifacts. If you drive around Rome, you will see numerous massive obelisks with metal crosses set on top, clearly long-after the manufacturing of the obelisk itself.

Similarly, when exploring the ruins in Athens, my tour guide discussed the Greek city-states, and how each one would designate a “patron god,” as the deity for their community. For example, in Athens the people worshiped Athena, and built a temple for her. In the city-states of Delphi and Delos, they worshipped the god Apollo. Rather than dispose of the patron gods and such worship, the Roman Catholic Church merely gave the concept a Catholic twist. Now instead of patron gods over communities, we have patron saints, such as St. David over Wales, St. Joseph over Slovenia, the Virgin Mary over the United States, and St. George over England. There are patron saints over individual communities as well, such as St. Rainerius over Pisa, St. Aloysius Gonzaga over Messina, and a host of patron saints over Rome and other communities throughout Italy.

One need not spend a ton of time studying the history of the Roman Catholic Church before they would realize how far that church strayed from the Bible, and how little biblical support the Roman Catholic Church has for much of its doctrines and teachings. Indeed, such led to the Protestant Reformation, which is usually considered to have been started by Martin Luther, who criticized the church for an abundance of practices that had no foundation in the Bible. Most Christians, at least those deriving from the Protestant movement, would agree that this was an amazing God-inspired movement to reform the church away from the false traditions developed over the centuries.

However, the Reformation did not stop there. The Reformation period went from approximately 1517 with Martin Luther through the first part of the 1600s, before we then enter into the “First Great Awakening,” which was a Christian revival that flourished in Britain and the Thirteen Colonies in the 1730s and 1740s, with some of the greatest Christian theologians such as John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards. This was an evangelical movement that brought about uniformity in such ideas of salvation and conversion and spawned the creation of evangelical institutions such as Dartmouth and Princeton (how they have fallen since then!). I would submit that each of these movements was a step further away from the Roman Catholic Church and a step closer to the doctrines of the biblical Christianity.

Finally, we enter into the Second Great Awakening, which was a Protestant religious revival beginning in the 1790s and continuing for about fifty to sixty years. During this time period, church membership would explode for the Baptists and Methodists. At this time there was also a Christian movement that began to “restore” the church from within, led by two different groups started by Barton W. Stone and another by Thomas Campbell, arguably pushing towards a

more bible-based Christianity, such as agreement for baptism by immersion (as opposed to sprinkling) and communion on the first day of the week. This has been coined the “Restoration Movement” or “American Restoration Movement.” This movement began on the United States frontier during the same time period as the Second Great Awakening, and also was the era where we find Joseph Smith, who would adopt the same terminology in attempting to “restore” the “true church.”

The “Great” Apostasy

It is without a doubt that the reformers and those involved in the awakenings felt as though the Catholic Church had essentially apostatized from the original teachings of Christ, and indeed, contradicted the Bible with many of its traditions and beliefs. It was during the time of this same belief that we find the beginnings of Mormonism, where every other church and its creeds were deemed an “abomination” before God. Indeed, as recounted earlier, according to the Church, God told Joseph that the professors of these denominations were “corrupt,” and eventually He would “restore” the one true church through Joseph Smith. This claim is further reiterated by ongoing church doctrine of the “Great Apostasy.” Although the word “apostate” and even “apostasy” may be familiar to most Christians, the phrase “the apostasy” in Mormonism has a special connotation, describing a specific period of time where there was essentially no true church or authority on the earth. Specifically, Mormonism teaches:

During the Great Apostasy, people were without divine direction from living prophets. Many churches were established, but they did not have priesthood power to lead people to the true knowledge of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Parts of the holy scriptures were corrupted or lost, and no one had the

authority to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost or perform other priesthood ordinances.⁷⁵

The Church, naturally, goes on to assure the reader that “[w]e now live in a time when the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored. But unlike the Church in times past, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will not be overcome by general apostasy.”⁷⁶

Thus, to summarize where we are so far, the Church teaches that once the apostles died, their authority to heal, perform miracles, and guide the early church died with them and the church as a whole went into apostasy and the truth was lost from the earth. The Church utilizes the corruption of the Catholic Church as further confirmation of this apostasy, pointing to indulgences and other corrupt practices of that organization as proof that God, essentially, was no longer on the earth at that time.⁷⁷ According to the Church, because there was no longer a true church, there needed to be a restoration, not only of theology, but of *authority*. The Book of Mormon was presented to address and correct many of the church doctrine concerns, including addressing baptism by immersion and handling such issues as the very nature of God. Thus, the

⁷⁵ Apostasy, ChurchofJesusChrist.org, available at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/true-to-the-faith/apostasy?lang=eng>.

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ While it cannot be disputed that the Catholic Church ran amok with power and corruption for a significant period, there is no evidence to support the Mormon theory that God withdrew and left the people without his spirit and revelation to guide those who truly seek Him. In fact, this belief is contradictory to John 14:16 (ESV) which states, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, (the Holy Spirit) to be with you *forever*, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.” (emphasis added). Christ promised the people, his followers, the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be with them “forever,” which would contradict a complete withdrawal as implied by the Church.

Church argues, Joseph was key to this restoration, with the heavenly visitors not only restoring the correct theology, but also the authority to perform things such as baptism, bestowal of the Holy Ghost, and perform miracles and healings.

We could certainly discuss how doctrines of Mormonism *actually* more closely align with the Catholic church (saved [or exalted] by works and ordinances, discredits the Bible, living prophet/pope) than Protestant Christianity, however, there are two primary questions that naturally arise with the Mormon doctrine of the Great Apostasy:

- 1) Was there ever an apostasy so great that God had to start over?
- 2) Was there ever “authority” that could be lost in the first place?

Let us start with the first question: Was there an uncorrectable apostasy of truth?

Asked another way: did this apostasy, starting after the death of the apostles and largely culminating with the Roman Catholic Church, create an irreversible condition where God needed to essentially start over?

Most protestant historians would say the answer is a clear “no.” Frankly, throughout the Bible we find a never-ending period of apostasy, even points where the vast majority of the Children of Israel were going astray. Here are just a few examples.

Almost immediately after the children of Israel had been led out of Egypt, they strayed. When Moses went up the mount to meet with God and obtain the tablets, as part of the covenant ceremony, the people promised that they would “do and obey all that the Lord has commanded.”⁷⁸ However, after

⁷⁸ Exodus 24:7 (CSB).

he goes up the mountain, they waste almost no time before they approach Aaron and ask him to make them an idol to worship. Aaron, who had literally just been the mouthpiece of God for Moses before Pharaoh, quickly obliged and started a big party.⁷⁹ God stopped this wickedness and apostasy by sending Moses back down the mountain to correct his straying children.

During the ministry of Elijah, the apostasy was so bad that Elijah thought he was the last one to worship the true God. However, God assured him that there were others. In 1 Kings 19:14-18 (CSB) we read:

“I have been very zealous for the Lord God of Armies,” he replied, “but the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they’re looking for me to take my life.” Then the Lord said to him, “Go and return by the way you came to the Wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu. *But I will leave seven thousand in Israel — every knee that has not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.*”

Reading further into 2 Kings, we find the story of King Manasseh who was a wicked king, doing what “was evil in the

⁷⁹ Exodus 32 (CSB).

Lord's sight, imitating the detestable practices of the nations that the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites."⁸⁰ He set up altars for Baal and even built altars in the temple. He led the people drastically astray and "shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem with it from one end to the other."⁸¹ His son Amon was equally wicked and had a very short reign after his father. By the time Josiah took over, when he was only eight years old, the people had gone completely astray and had virtually forgotten God. Josiah, on the other hand, decided he was going to try to follow the Lord, and while repairing the temple that had been desecrated by his father, he discovered the "Book of the Law," and began to lead the people according to God's word.

If we fast-forward to the New Testament we find Jesus redirecting people from an essentially fallen church that was led by the wicked teachers of the law who had added over 600 new rules in addition to the Ten Commandments, valuing the traditions of the elders more than the actual law of God. Go further into the epistles of Paul, and even after Christ and the apostles had set up the church, virtually *every* letter was trying to correct some incorrect teaching or mini apostasy that was going on.

Thus, history appears to confirm that there was no need for an angelic visit from heaven to "restore" God's truths. I think it would be safe to say that the church has virtually *always* been in a state of apostasy, at least partially (if not almost totally) straying from true doctrines, but never without the ability to redirect course and be inspired through the Holy Spirit to get back on the correct path. If we look at Martin Luther and the other leaders of the Reformation, then onto others who fervently sought God in the various awakenings,

⁸⁰ 2 Kings 21:2-5 (CSB).

⁸¹ Id. at v. 16. (CSB).

we can see the promise from God that “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.”⁸²

Authority

So, although we have established that the church was not likely irreparably broken due to poor theology, we are brought to the next question. Was there an irreparable apostasy due to the lack of authority?

Before we get too far, however, we need to clarify by what the Church claims as “authority.” The Church teaches that Joseph Smith received two separate priesthoods: the Aaronic and the Melchizedek Priesthood. These priesthoods could only be transferred by the laying on of hands. The Church teaches that on May 15, 1829, upon reading about baptism during the translation process, Joseph Smith and his scribe Oliver Cowdery went to a private area and prayed. During their prayer, they were visited by John the Baptist, who laid hands upon them and ordained them, conferring upon them the “Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.”⁸³ After they received this authority, they baptized each other and then laid hands on each other and ordained each other to the Aaronic Priesthood.⁸⁴ Then in May of 1829, the Church claims that Peter, James, and John appeared to them and conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood. According to the Church, the “Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things.” In short, the “priesthood is the power and authority that God gives to

⁸² Proverbs 8:17 (ESV).

⁸³ Joseph Smith History, v. 69.

⁸⁴ *Id.*

man to act in all things *necessary* for the salvation of God's children."⁸⁵

What is important to understand here is *how* the church views the priesthood. The best analogy I can come up with is that the Mormon priesthood is like a baton.

Bear with me through this terrible analogy.

Imagine a set of runners in a relay race. They are all running along just fine, then one of them stumbles, drops the baton, and the baton rolls off into the gutter and is swept away forever. That team is screwed. That team is disqualified, and the race is over for them. That is how the Church views the priesthood; if you killed off every person who had the priesthood, there would be no one left with a baton and it would be gone forever. They claim, essentially, that this is what happened with the previous apostles. The Church believes that Jesus conferred the priesthood to his apostles, they preached, they died, and the priesthood was lost. And apparently, they never gave this priesthood to anyone else. Of course, they also point out that the churches ran amok as well during that time, but as we have discussed, that is a mistake that can be corrected, even without the appearance of heavenly visitors.

Is There Even a Baton?

For me, the issue of authority was one of the big, if not the biggest, hurdles with leaving the Mormon Church. I believed that someone had to have this authority (this baton if you will) to lead God's church. I believed it was necessary to have a living leader, to address the day's dilemmas and speak for God. I believed that the Bible clearly indicated that Jesus

⁸⁵ Priesthood, ChurchofJesusChrist.org, available at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/priesthood?lang=eng> (emphasis added).

gave authority to his apostles, so in order to have the true church, then that church would have to have that authority. In other words, you couldn't just have any random Christian baptizing another without this authority. You couldn't have people casting out evil spirits or doing miracles in Christ's name without authority. Growing up Mormon, when you gave someone a blessing through the laying on of hands, any healing was attributed to the "power (or authority) of the priesthood." Indeed, this is because Jesus "called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases."⁸⁶

There is a painting prominently displayed in many Mormon Church buildings, entitled "Christ Ordaining the Apostles" by Harry Anderson, where we find Christ standing in the middle of the twelve apostles, with one of the apostles kneeling before Christ who has placed his hands on his head and is, presumably, conferring this authority as identified in the Gospels. This is a reminder to anyone entering a Mormon Church building that this is the Church that has *that* authority. Joseph Smith taught, and the Church maintains, that it is the only entity on earth that has this "priesthood authority," and is therefore the only people that can perform the ordinances (such as baptism or conferring the Holy Ghost). This is the only entity that has a clear picture of God's plan for the salvation of his people.

Indeed, such is embedded into the specific doctrines of the Church, as Article of Faith 1:5 states: "We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof." This idea of authority permeates the Church and its scriptures. For example, in the Book of Mormon, in Mosiah 21, we read of

⁸⁶ Luke 9:1 (ESV).

King Limhi and his people who were attempting to follow God. The people and the King had “entered into a covenant with God to serve him and keep his commandments.”⁸⁷ They wanted to follow God and be baptized as well, however, we read that they could not be baptized because “there was none in the land that had authority from God.”⁸⁸

In explaining his point further, Joseph taught that even angels could not baptize if “there were legal officers in the flesh holding the keys of the kingdom, or the authority of the priesthood.”⁸⁹ In emphasizing this, he pointed out that Paul, while on the road to Damascus and blinded by the Lord, was not informed as to “how he could be saved.”⁹⁰ Joseph claimed that because Christ “had set in the church firstly Apostles, and secondly prophets, for the work of the ministry,” referring to Ephesians 4:11-12, he claimed that “Paul could not learn so much from the Lord relative to his duty in the common salvation of man, as he could from one of Christ’s ambassadors called with the same heavenly calling of the Lord, and endowed with the same power from on high—so that what they loosed on earth, should be loosed in heaven; and what they bound on earth should be bound in heaven.”⁹¹ In other words, because of this supposed heavenly order that Christ established, Paul “could not” learn what he needed regarding his duty directly from the Lord, or even receive this authority to do such; *he had to go through man*, in this case Ananias, to get that knowledge and authority.

Does that even make sense? Our all-powerful Lord “could not” reveal truths or authority to man because of some

⁸⁷ Mosiah 21:32.

⁸⁸ *Id.* at v. 33.

⁸⁹ “Baptism,” an editorial by Joseph Smith published in *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 1, 1842, p. 905.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

supposed pattern that he set up and was bound by? Did Christ really set up a church where all authority and power were *given* to man?

When you really sit down and think about it, the theory is a little preposterous, however, this is what you grow up believing in the Church: God has given the priesthood holders in the Church the authority to act in his name, to do his work, to perform ordinances such as baptism, conferring the Holy Ghost, and to bless and heal the sick. They are the *only* ones with this “baton” of authority. The heavenly baton was lost due to the death of the Apostles (unclear why they didn’t hand it off), and then it was restored to Joseph Smith through the heavenly visitations of John the Baptist, followed by Peter, James, and John. One of the primary biblical sources they utilize for this theory is in Matthew which states, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”⁹² This translation, in the ESV, is worded similar to the King James Version, which reads, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Thus, one way to interpret this passage, and the way it is interpreted by the Mormon Church, is that those who have this priesthood authority have “the keys” or the control over the salvation of men. Indeed, this very logic was used by Heber C. Kimball when he declared that no one would get to heaven without Brigham Young’s permission.⁹³ In other words, this

⁹² Matthew 16:19 (ESV).

⁹³ A Discourse by President Heber C. Kimball, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, November 2, 1856, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4 p. 64.

authority is entirely given to man, and any actions that man takes with that authority must be accepted and respected in heaven.

Again, does any of this make sense?

Why would God entrust, or “bind” Himself to the whims and wills of man? Why would God give His own power and authority to a fallen being who is quite likely to use and abuse that power? The simple answer: He would not.

Such interpretation defies logic and is contrary to the Bible. In fact, if we read other English translations of the same passage in Matthew, we are given a new perspective. Here are a few other translations of this same passage for your comparison:

New American Standard Bible: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Berean Literal Bible: “I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you might bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you might loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens.”

Christian Standard Bible: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.”

The key phrase in all of these translations is “will have been” as opposed to “will be.” Even in the footnotes for the

ESV version, it acknowledges the interpretation could be “Or shall have been bound... shall have been loosed.” Another way to look at this passage is that you will be so directed by the Holy Spirit that you will essentially ratify or make known something that is *already* in accordance with and *already* accepted by God. You will reveal a heavenly truth as opposed to doing something which God is later forced to adopt because of this power given to man.⁹⁴

Such an interpretation makes more sense and is consistent with the nature of God revealed throughout the scriptures. Further, reading in the New Testament, we find a complete stranger, someone who had never had this “authority” conveyed upon him, performing the exact works that the apostles were given authority to perform! In Mark it reads:

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a

⁹⁴ This is similar to the passage we find in John 20:23, where Christ says, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven then; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (CSB) The proper way to read this passage is that it is a pronouncement of something that is already accomplished. Those who have accepted the Gospel *have* received forgiveness of their sins. If they reject the Gospel, then they have no forgiveness. If Christ was passing the power to forgive sins, then the passage would have been worded “If you forgive the sins of any, they *will be* forgiven,” as opposed to “are [already] forgiven.” This passage is consistent among most translations.

cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.⁹⁵

In the CSB and other translations, “mighty work” is interpreted as miracle.

The only way to logically interpret this scripture is that the power is from God, and can be accessed by anyone and controlled by no one.

Post-Resurrection

God is the only authority, and power and authority come from God and God alone, and on this earth, such is given through Christ (who is God the Son). In Mathew 28, we see Jesus confirming this fact, stating that “[a]ll authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”⁹⁶ Though it is clear that God will often demonstrate his power through individuals, it is not something that he has permanently delegated to any specific person or organization. In other words, although the power of Christ may be demonstrated or manifested *through* individuals, it is not our own possession and it has not been “given” to us in the sense of control or *exclusivity*.

This line of thought is more consistent with the Biblical narrative after the death and resurrection of Christ. In Acts 3, we read of the first miracle performed after receiving the Holy Spirit:

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and

⁹⁵ Mark 9:38-41 (ESV).

⁹⁶ Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV).

John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.⁹⁷

There was no laying on of hands, there was no “by the authority that has been given to me.” There was only a command in the name of Jesus Christ for the man to be healed, and he was! But as we read, Peter makes this even clearer. Let us continue.

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them...when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and

⁹⁷ Acts 3:1-10 (ESV).

denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him...And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.⁹⁸

Peter reassures everyone that it is no special power that he holds. It is nothing of his doing, but it is only in the name, and the faith in the name, of Jesus Christ that the man was made whole. Appalled that the name of Jesus continued to be spoken, Peter and John were then apprehended and brought before the rulers, who questioned them, “[b]y what power or by what name did you do this?”⁹⁹ The scripture continues:

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, *by what means this man has been healed*, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that *by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—*by him* this man is standing before you well.¹⁰⁰

Again, we see nothing about a special priesthood or any special power that was held by Peter or any of the apostles. It was only by the name of Jesus Christ that this man was healed.

Continuing through Acts, we find more guidance. As discussed earlier, Mormons believe the Holy Spirit (always

⁹⁸ Acts 3:11-16 (ESV).

⁹⁹ Acts 3:7 (ESV).

¹⁰⁰ Act 4:8-10 (ESV) (emphasis added).

referred to as the Holy Ghost keeping with King James tradition in the Church) is conferred through the laying on of hands, through the priesthood power. This ordinance is performed after one is baptized into the Church. However, while there certainly were biblical instances where hands were laid and the Holy Spirit received, this is not a pattern or requirement that God has demanded. In Acts 10, we find that Peter spoke to the crowd, which included Jews and Gentiles. In the middle of his message, the Holy Spirit came down on those listening, and *then* they were instructed to be baptized, opposing both the order and the method ordained by the Church.

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.¹⁰¹

In summary, if you go through the miracles in the New Testament, there is never a proclaiming of power or authority held by man. There is never a specific pattern that had to be followed for the miracles to occur. Sometimes they were merely spoken in the name of Christ, sometimes there are miracles, even curses, that relied only upon the faith of the messenger. Sometimes people were given the Holy Spirit after they were baptized; sometimes it was the other way around. I

¹⁰¹ Acts 10:44-48 (ESV).

believe God does this for a reason. The miracles are directly attributed to the power of God and/or the name of Christ and there is no pattern, practice, or special ordinance that is given to people so that they can claim it as their own.

Authority or Exclusivity?

When it comes down to it, I believe the entire basis for claiming authority is to claim power and control over others. Authority, in the eyes of man, means exclusivity. I believe the man-made idea of authority or power, claiming exclusive right to the things of God, is directly from Satan. I realize this is a strong statement and may be off-putting to a few.

However, hear me out.

As we have seen, all authority and power have, and always will, rest with God. It is His and His alone. Satan believed he could be as God, that he should hold the power of God and could even make himself like God, and it was this very wickedness that caused his fall.¹⁰² In the Bible, we find this struggle for power in many instances. In Numbers, we read of Korah, a Levite, along with Dathan and Abiram rebelling against Moses because they wanted the authority, unhappy that Moses and Aaron seemed to be running the show.¹⁰³ In the New Testament, the Pharisees and Sadducees were obsessed with authority and exclusivity. Only the Pharisees, the scribes, and the teachers of the law held the “authority” to administer in the things of God. They claimed their lineage or heritage was essentially their right and power into the kingdom of God, and unfortunately most of them never got the picture despite Christ trying to beat this into their heads. Indeed, in the very beginning of the New Testament we find John the Baptist warning the Pharisees and Sadducees,

¹⁰² Isaiah 14:12-15.

¹⁰³ Numbers 16.

stating “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? *And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*” They had no exclusivity, no power over God or *even from* God, yet they did everything they could to hold on to that delusion.

In the New Testament we read that the chief priests, scribes, and elders came to Jesus and asked him, “[b]y what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”¹⁰⁴ Of course, Jesus did not reveal it to them. In the Gospels we read that the people were astonished at his teaching, “for he taught them as one who had authority.”¹⁰⁵ Much of the New Testament is replete with stories of the growing anger the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders felt because Jesus was a threat to the claim of their exclusivity to God. Indeed, it was this very reason they sought to kill him!

In John 11 we read that “the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both *our place* and our nation...’ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”¹⁰⁶ Afraid that they would no longer be sought as the keyholders of God’s kingdom, they plotted to kill the Savior. Christ, the only one with *actual* authority, challenged those with false authority and they were afraid of losing their position. In fact, even more interestingly, Satan himself tried to use his own supposed authority as an enticement in one of his temptations of Christ! In the Bible we read that “the devil took him up and showed

¹⁰⁴ Mark 11:28 (ESV).

¹⁰⁵ Mark 1:22 (ESV).

¹⁰⁶ John 11:47-48 (ESV).

him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.’”¹⁰⁷

This entire claim on authority by any organization comes down to exclusivity and control. The churches claim that *they* are the ones with the power, *they* are the chosen ones, *they* are the ones who have the claim to and power over your salvation. If you want to come to God, you have to go through them. This was the message of the Pharisees. Christ says otherwise. *Christ is the way, the truth, and the life*, no man comes to the Father *except through him, and him alone*. Christ is the only one who has *proven* not to be corrupted by power. Christ created the very world he came to die in.¹⁰⁸ Christ had power over the men who crucified him, but instead chose to voluntarily relinquish that power and lay down his life. Christ was equal to God, but laid down all power so that he could come, serve, and give his life as a ransom for *our* sins.¹⁰⁹ Unlike the Pharisees, Christ never elevated himself. He served those around him and gave everything for them. Christ washed the feet of his apostles and instructed them to be as humble.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Christ warned that “those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”¹¹¹

We know from the Old Testament that there was a sacred place in the temple called the Holy of Holies, which

¹⁰⁷ Luke 4:5-6 (ESV).

¹⁰⁸ John 1:1-3 (ESV) (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”).

¹⁰⁹ John 5:18.

¹¹⁰ John 13:5-17.

¹¹¹ Mathew 23:12 (NIV).

was the place where God would appear. It was kept separate by a large curtain or veil, and only the high priest could enter that room, and only once a year, when he would make atonement for his own sins and then for the sins of the people.

When Christ died on the cross, that veil (which was estimated to be around 4-inches thick) was torn from top to bottom, symbolically opening any barriers to God.¹¹² Thus, we no longer have to go through our earthly priests to reach God. We do not go through patron saints, bishops, prophets, or priesthood holders. *We only have one high priest, and that is Christ Jesus, and he is the only one by whom we come to the Father.*¹¹³ It boggles my mind that Mormons, Catholics, and others try their hardest to stitch back up the very veil that Christ tore apart. I find it ironic that Christ's death tore the temple veil apart, but the "restored" Church has not only reinstated temples, but also placed a new veil to separate God from the rest of us, and one cannot pass through that veil without ordinances, authorities, and secret symbols.

Baptism?

But what about baptism? Putting aside miracles, the Holy Spirit, and casting out demons for the moment, does someone have to have specific authority to perform an ordinance like baptism? Baptism is a beautiful symbol of our old life of sin dying as Christ died on the cross and the new life beginning as we rise out of the water as Christ rose from the grave. Indeed, as Paul exclaimed, "our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Matthew 27:51.

¹¹³ Hebrews 4:14-16.

¹¹⁴ Romans 6:6-7 (ESV).

But, can anyone just baptize anyone, or must one have some special authority to do so? I was hung up on this issue for a long time. Indeed, this specific ordinance was fixed in my mind as separate and apart from everything else, and that authority was required to perform it. Indeed, perhaps this is because the Book of Mormon reiterates this more than once.

However, contrary to the Church's teachings, I believe the answer is yes, anyone can baptize anyone, so long as the person being baptized is a believer in Christ. If we look to the Bible as our source, we do not have a particular direction on the specifics of who can baptize. We know that Jesus himself did not baptize anyone.¹¹⁵ We know that Paul himself, although arguably the biggest missionary with the most converts, baptized only a few people himself.¹¹⁶ We know that Philip the Evangelist performed miracles and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch.¹¹⁷ We also know that during the day of Pentecost, Peter commanded and baptized a multitude of about 3,000 people.¹¹⁸ It seems unlikely to think that Peter, or even the twelve, were capable of performing 3,000 baptisms by themselves during such a short period of time, unless those who had been baptized assisted with the further baptisms.

In short, we don't have specific direction on *who* can baptize. However, we don't have anything in the Bible that says you must have a specific authority to baptize either! We do see that those who were not apostles *were* serving and

¹¹⁵ John 4:1 (ESV) (“Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples)”).

¹¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 (ESV) (“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel.”).

¹¹⁷ Acts 8:36-39.

¹¹⁸ Acts 2:37-41.

baptizing others, and we do not have any biblical reference that any of these had been given any special authority to do such. Thus, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Christians can baptize those who are willing to follow Christ; there is no special authority needed to do such. Again, there is no claim for baptismal authority – we come to the Father through Christ and Christ alone.

Conclusion

Discovering that authority was not necessary set me free from the shackles to a specific church as the source for my salvation. Indeed, there is no “true church.” Although God certainly wants unity among his children, I believe he has allowed such disunity among churches so that the people will realize that there is no church that we must turn to for our salvation. The Mormon Church, the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, or any other church is not the way, the truth, and the life. Although a church can and should help God’s children with fellowship, opportunities to serve, spiritual renewal and taking of the communion (the sacrament), the church is not your gatekeeper to God. That role is filled by Christ and Christ alone.

Discovering this fact was extremely freeing.

Chapter 6: Even if it is False...

I had now arrived at the logical conclusion that the Church was not true, and in fact there was no “true church” at all. All churches were messed up and imperfect to some degree, some more than others. This brought up another dilemma, however. If there was no “true church,” then why not just keep going to the same church? I already had roots there. I already had friends there. I was already invested. I could just disregard those things that were not true and focus my life on Christ, right? In fact, for a while, I even entertained the thought of “buffet Mormonism,” where I would essentially choose the things I wanted and disregard the rest. That would work, right?

Well, maybe, but it is probably not the best choice.

Imagine this scenario. You are wandering in the barren desert and dying of thirst. Out in the distance you see a pool of water. You approach the pool and you find the water, but the water is pretty murky and there are bugs covering its surface. It will have to do because you are dying and need water. However, you then notice just to the right, there is another person there and he is giving away clean, filtered bottled water. Which would you choose? Sure, both will probably keep you from dying of thirst. However, who knows what other crap you might get with the pool.

You say, “OK, I get your point; but how do we know if any of those other churches are closer to the truth than Mormonism? Maybe they all have their wonky backgrounds, doctrines, and teachings. Maybe they all are just as far-fetched.”

Well, unlike what you probably grew up with, *most* (there still are some) of the churches out there do not continue

to preach stuff that they basically know to be inconsistent with the Bible. Again, as we discussed, the past and current teachings of the Church contradict the Bible and even their own doctrines. The Book of Mormon spoke out against polygamy describing it as an “abomination,” but the Doctrine & Covenants teaches it as essential for exaltation! I don’t know of any major religion that continues to push the “truth” of its teachings when its own teachings actually contradict each other. Further, luckily, you have a report card for all of the churches out there. You have a standard by which you can judge that church’s teachings: The Bible. The closer that Church holds to the teachings of Christ and the Bible, the more likely it is that you are going to be getting the truth from them. If you cannot find what they are teaching in the Bible, then you should probably disregard it. If your church constantly teaches things that are not in the Bible, or if it teaches things that contradict the Bible, then you should definitely move on.

So now you ask, “well, how do we know the Bible is standard that we should use? It was written thousands of years ago, and I’ve been taught by the Church that it’s corrupted?”

We will get to that.

Suffice to say for the moment, the evidence you will see is that the Bible is true. The Bible has not been corrupted. I will introduce the evidence and not ask you to take my feelings as evidence or to just ask you to blindly trust me. *As we will get to next, blind faith is not something required of you.*

Additionally, for me personally, although I toyed with the idea of remaining in the Church for a while after discovering everything, I realized I didn’t want my children to toss out Jesus Christ with the dirty bathwater of Church’s history. My kids have believed in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and more fictional characters than I would care for.

When they realize Santa is not real, it is not a big deal. It would be easier to focus on the real meaning of Christmas for that matter. But my point is this: thanks to the internet, I knew my children would eventually find out about Brigham Young's crazy teachings. They would find out about the Book of Abraham. They would find out about the false doctrine of polygamy. Worse yet, they would be in a church that insisted these things were from God in spite of all evidence to the contrary. They would put two and two together at some point and realize the Mormon Church is not what it purports to be. I did not want them associating Jesus Christ with an organization that simply is not true and continues to teach incorrect doctrines. Although there may not be a "true church," I would rather take a *truer church* that is trying to lead one to Christ than one that is claiming that it is "the" true church and has all of the answers but contradicts itself and the standard of the Bible.

Finally, a friend who converted from Catholicism to Christianity once told me, "you go where you get fed." It was a simple but profound statement. If you're getting spiritually fed, if you find yourself becoming a better person and your heart changing by the truths being taught through the Bible by any given church, then odds are you are at least heading in the general direction you should be.

A Word of Caution

Do not get me wrong here. I am not saying you must rely on a church for your salvation; I hope I have made that abundantly clear. *It is through Christ only that we need to look.* In many situations, there may be one spouse who is questioning the theology he or she grew up with, and the other spouse is still a faithful member of the Church and unwilling to even consider the evidence to the contrary; one spouse leaving the Church abruptly may cause a painful rift in the

marriage and may not be the best choice. *In fact, it may be a terrible choice. In such situations just seek the Lord!* Everyone's journey is different and seeking the Spirit for guidance is your best choice. Maybe you need to stick with "buffet Mormonism" for a while, maybe even for longer than you might like. Seek Christ in your own study. You have the Bible and thanks to the internet and your smartphone you have access to dozens of other translations of the Bible that are easier to understand than the King James Version, and can easily find online resources that are not available through the Church.

In my own journey, I did not immediately leave the Church. As outlined above, it was a long process, years even. Even after I had decided that the Church was not true, I still faithfully attended for quite a while. However, I began to use an NIV version of the Bible that helped me better understand the Word and the passages that I used to be confused by. I downloaded dozens of podcasts and sermons from other preachers and churches to expose myself to the truths of Christianity out there. I downloaded books and gained insights that were not available to me through the Church. I even visited a handful of other churches, often after I had attended my three-hour block at the Church. Many non-denominational churches have Saturday services. So, if you are in such a situation, do not give up hope – just seek Christ and continue to pray for guidance as you go along!

Chapter 7: Evidence or “Just Have Faith”

Whenever I had doubts growing up, whether they be related to Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, the Church’s current prophet or leadership, or even related to my local congregational leadership (our stake president, local bishop, or other local leader), if something seemed illogical or even contradictory, I would be told to “just have faith,” or just “trust God.” The only problem with those answers is that much of the time I didn’t necessarily have faith in my local leaders, and I didn’t feel like “trusting God” had anything to do with my legitimate question as to what my local or regional leader was doing, or whether their direction was right.

In other words, it felt as though they were answering a question that I did not ask.

You may wonder where I’m going with this chapter.

At this stage of my journey, I wanted to know truth. I was stuck with so much blind faith growing up in the Church that I wanted to know whether blind faith was what was required of a Christian. Could I really know truth, or is this largely a guessing game and I just have to “have faith?” How could I know something is true? I felt jilted after Mormonism and didn’t want to go that route again.

With the “authority” and “one true church” dilemmas out of the way and recognizing that there was not a “true church,” and only potentially a true Christ, I was free to move on to investigating other churches. However, I was going to be cautious. I did not want to be fooled and I wanted evidence for the truth of the things that I would hear from the preachers. Frankly, even though I still believed in Christ, I wanted evidence for him too.

I found the evidence, but we'll get to that a bit later.

Faith Defined

Before we get too far, I suppose it would be helpful to define faith. Biblically, faith seems to be synonymous with trust in most instances. In the Oxford Companion to the Bible, it is defined as: “[It is a] kind of regard for or confidence in someone or something. ... Abram's willingness to trust God... makes him the primary example of the biblical concept of faith... a form of the Greek word *pisteuein*, ‘to trust’...”¹¹⁹ Often when the disciples were criticized, it was due to a lack of trust in Christ.¹²⁰ Paul, in his various New Testament letters repeatedly discussed faith, what it is, and why it is necessary. In Hebrews 11:1 (ESV), he states that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” However, that verse alone needs context. If we continue to verse six, we read, “[a]nd without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Verse seven continues, “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” Although this is just a few of the relevant scriptures, and there are many more you can review for further clarification, I believe faith can be sufficiently defined as trust, which is demonstrated or confirmed through trust-filled obedience.

¹¹⁹ (Oxford, 1993), 222.

¹²⁰ See e.g. Mark 4:40 (NIV) (After calming the storm, “He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”).

Blind Faith

CS Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity* confirms the same. In discussing faith, Lewis writes:

Roughly speaking, the word faith seems to be used by Christians in two senses or on two levels, and I will take them in turn. In the first sense it means simply belief—accepting or regarding as true the doctrines of Christianity. That is fairly simple. But what does puzzle people—at least it used to puzzle me—is the fact that Christians regard faith in this sense as a virtue. I used to ask how on Earth it can be a virtue—what is there moral or immoral about believing or not believing a set of statements? Obviously, I used to say, a sane man accepts or rejects any statement, not because he wants or does not want to, but because the evidence seems to him good or bad. If he were mistaken about the goodness or badness of the evidence, that would not mean he was a bad man, but only that he was not very clever. And if he thought the evidence bad but tried to force himself to believe in spite of it, that would be merely stupid.¹²¹

Lewis continues to explain that *faith is based on reason and evidence* and is opposed by emotion and imagination. He states, “I am not asking anyone to accept Christianity if his best reasoning tells him that the weight of evidence is against it. That is not the point at which faith comes in.”¹²² In fact, he defines faith as “the art of holding onto things your reason has

¹²¹ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 77.

¹²² *Id.*

once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.”¹²³ Thus, in short, Christian faith is based on reason and evidence, and then held on to despite temptations and trials. It is a virtue because you have weighed the evidence, found it to be sound, and *then* continued with the knowledge you have gained.

So, being synonymous with trust or obedience based upon reason and evidence, are we simply to have trust in our spiritual leaders? Should we just follow that prosperity preacher on television because he says we should trust him and look how great his life has turned out? If a leader approaches you and tells you that God told him to command you to sell your home and give the money to him, are you supposed to “just have faith” and follow?

The real question is this: Are we ever to simply follow without prior evidence sufficient to earn that trust?

In other words, are we supposed to have “blind faith?”

Clearly, the answer is a resounding “NO.” In fact, *Christ never taught this*, and I would argue that it is actually anti-biblical. For example, let us turn to Exodus 3:16-17. Here the Lord commands Moses to “[g]o and gather the elders of Israel together” to inform them of his plan to deliver the people. Moses, questioning whether they would believe him, was then given a series of signs that he was supposed to perform in private for the elders of Israel. In Chapter 4:1-9 (ESV) we find the Lord giving Moses a series of signs that he is to perform for the elders of Israel so they will believe and follow, so they will *then* have faith in the Lord. It reads:

Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to

¹²³ *Id.*

you.” The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— “that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

A cursory reading might lead one to believe these are the miracles/plagues that he would perform for Pharaoh, however, these were actually a preview given to the elders of Israel so that they could have faith in the Lord, that He was there to deliver them. Indeed, if we read on to verses 29-31, we find:

Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had

spoken to Moses *and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed;* and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped. (emphasis added)

This concept of evidence before faith is further reiterated in Exodus 14:31 (NIV): “And *when* the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.” In other words, Moses didn’t show up, say “hey guys, load up and let’s go; just have faith in me that you won’t be killed on your way out of Egypt!” There were signs, including significant signs and evidence that *precipitated* the faith for them to follow and begin the exodus from Egypt.

Let us look at some more examples, from Christ and the apostles.

This, initially, appears to be a more difficult one. Indeed, when we read Mathew 4:19-22 alone, it appears that Jesus did not know Peter, Andrew, James, and John prior to this, and that upon him simply calling them, they dropped everything and immediately followed, indicating a form of blind faith. This was an example often cited by my leaders as an example of when we just needed to trust in our prophet, local leaders, etc. The apostles just dropped everything they had and ran after someone they did not know at all, because they trusted in God... right?

However, you realize by reading all four Gospels together, especially with a focus on John, that such is not the case. In Matthew 4:19-22 (ESV) we read:

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Again, taken alone, this appears to be a prime example of blind faith. However, when we read in John, we find that Andrew was *already* a disciple of John, and John previously identified Jesus as the Christ, which *then* lead Andrew to follow him. In John 1:25-34 (ESV) we read:

They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John bore

witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

Thus, John the Baptist, who disciplined Andrew, immediately recognized Jesus as the Christ. If we continue through verse 41, we read:

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” *The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.* Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. *One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ).* (emphasis added)

Thus, before Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed Christ as identified in Matthew, they already knew him, in fact, they already were at least inclined to believe him to be the Christ! Let us continue through verse 42, where we read, “[h]e brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said,

‘You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).” Biblically, when someone changes the name of another individual, they are expressing ownership or authority over that individual.¹²⁴ Thus, it is quite probable that verse 42 was not the first encounter, or at least experience Peter had with Jesus; further, this shows that when Jesus called Peter from the boat, he had already been with Jesus before this official call to begin his apostleship.

Let’s continue through verse 50.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you

¹²⁴ See e.g., Genesis 17:5 (“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations) (ESV); Genesis 41:45 (“And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphenath-paneah.”).

believe? You will see greater things than these.”

What you should note, is that this chapter shows interactions with Peter, Andrew, Nathaniel, James, and John *before* John the Baptist was imprisoned. Jesus did not call them from their nets until after John the Baptist had been imprisoned. In other words, when Jesus called the apostles and they immediately left their nets, it was more of a “the time has come” kind of call, rather than “who is this stranger calling me?” kind of call.

Further, this reading is consistent with the rest of Christ’s teachings. Let us continue with the Gospel of John.

John 10:37-38 (ESV): “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, *believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*” Christ is telling you to believe the works he has been performing, and *then* you will know that he’s with the Father and that he is the Christ.

Even more interesting, even after John the Baptist had already identified Jesus as the Christ, Christ was still willing to show further evidence by his works. In Matthew 11:2-5 (ESV) we read: “Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.’” Christ did not just say “yeah, I’m the one, trust me, have faith.” He did not rebuke John for still having concerns. Instead, he pointed to the miracles that no one else but the Christ could

perform and pointed to the fulfillment of scripture.¹²⁵ He pointed to the evidence for who he was and has never asked you to just trust him at his word. If we were supposed to have blind faith, Christ would have come and performed no signs or miracles and just spoke smoothly and said follow me, like many of the cultists or false prophets of this age.

The signs and miracles that Christ performed were not just an end unto themselves; they were *proof* that he was who he says he was, that he was and is the Christ! Even after his death and resurrection, the evidences did not cease.

Turn to Acts 1:3 (ESV): “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering *by many proofs*, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” Indeed, it is by these proofs, by this evidence, that we can trust that Jesus is the Christ. Indeed, we are even *commanded* by God to test those who claim to speak in his name. In 1 John 4:1-6 (ESV) we read, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.”

This seems contrary to what you may have grown up believing and contrary to often cited Church leaders who preach a level of blind obedience. Indeed, former President Benson (an apostle at that time) spoke at Brigham Young University in 1980 laying out the “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” with number fourteen being: “The prophet and the presidency—the living prophet and the First Presidency—follow them and be blessed—reject them and

¹²⁵ See also Isaiah 29:18.

suffer.”¹²⁶ This is not abnormal and is often repeated. I must have heard a thousand times as a Mormon that I just needed to follow the prophet and everything would be fine; I just needed to trust my leaders and heed their counsel, for they were the mouthpieces for God. Indeed, there is even a church hymn that is sung regularly about following our living prophet. The final line of the lyrics are as follows:

Now we have a world where people are confused.

If you don't believe it, go and watch the news.

We can get direction all along our way,

If we heed the prophets—follow what they say.

Follow the prophet, follow the prophet,

Follow the prophet; don't go astray.

Follow the prophet, follow the prophet,

Follow the prophet; he knows the way.¹²⁷

Frankly, I never liked that song. I always thought it was weird to have a “hymn” that talked about watching the news. Plus, the melody itself seemed more appropriate for a Halloween song than for a hymn.

But I digress.

While serving as a missionary for the Church, I recall disputing with one of my mission leaders about blind obedience, when he told me that “as long as I do whatever my

¹²⁶ LDS.org, Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet, available at: <https://www.lds.org/liahona/1981/06/fourteen-fundamentals-in-following-the-prophet?lang=eng>

¹²⁷ Follow the Prophet, Children's Songbook, *available at:* <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/childrens-songbook/follow-the-prophet?lang=eng&r=1>.

leader tells me to do, I will be blessed.” I retorted, “even if he tells me to do something sinful?” My zone leader affirmed, though somewhat reluctantly, insisting that even committing a sin, if commanded by my leader, would be blessed of the Lord. This philosophy is based on a teaching by the prophet Heber J. Grant, and available in the 1972 July Ensign. In an article entitled *The Covenant of the Priesthood*, by Marion G. Romney, we read:

I was greatly impressed by the President’s remarks. I am glad he said what he did. Listening to him, I was taken back in my thoughts a quarter of a century to an experience I had with President Heber J. Grant. We were discussing some criticism that had been directed against an action taken by him in his official capacity. Putting his arm across my back and resting his hand on my left shoulder, he said, “My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church, *and if he tells you to do something wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it.*”

And then he added, “You don’t need to worry, however; the Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead his people astray.”¹²⁸

Keeping your eye on the President of the Church?
What about Christ?

Is there any biblical support for blind obedience? The answer, of course, is a resounding “no.”

¹²⁸ Prophet Heber J. Grant, as quoted by Apostle Marion G. Romney in “The Covenant of the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, July 1972, p. 98, also available online at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1972/04/the-covenant-of-the-priesthood.?lang=eng>.

I fear that this level of blind obedience if often further perpetuated by “testimony meetings.” Testimony meetings are special Sunday sessions held once a month, where there are no prepared talks or lessons during Sacrament Meeting (the primary worship service). During this time period the pulpit is open to individuals who are free to bear their testimonies, which testimonies, in my experience, center largely around the Church itself. Indeed, depending upon the demographics of the ward (congregation), as much as 50% of the meeting may be entirely overrun by small children whose first words at the pulpit are verbatim, “I know this church is true.” This is usually followed by something along the lines of professing knowledge that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith was a prophet, and that the current president of the church is a true prophet of God. Clearly, a five-year-old does not “know” any of these things. However, they are encouraged to get up and make such public professions, often by their parents or just by peer pressure from the other kids doing it.

While one could blame the Church “culture” itself for such behavior, this attitude is actually encouraged directly from the top. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, one of the Mormon apostles, has written an article for youth, instructing them on “how to gain a testimony.” Indeed, he re-affirms that “[a]nother way to seek a testimony seems astonishing when compared with the methods of obtaining other knowledge. *We gain or strengthen a testimony by bearing it.* Someone even suggested that some testimonies are better gained on the feet bearing them than on the knees praying for them.”¹²⁹ In other words, even if you don’t know the church is true, if you get up

¹²⁹ How to Gain a Testimony, published in the April 2008 Ensign, available at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/04/testimony?lang=eng&country=es>.

and testify that you do, just say it enough times, eventually you'll believe yourself.

Sounds healthy, doesn't it?

Again, this is not Christianity.

I probably need to reiterate at this point that I am not writing this for the purpose of attacking the Church.

I realize it may seem this way, but I believe it is important to distinguish between the actual teachings of Christ and the Bible as opposed to what the “modern prophets” and Church leadership routinely teach. In my experience, those leaving the Church end up with such disdain for such things, they end up associating these behaviors and teachings with Christianity as a whole, and assume that even being a Christian requires a significant amount of blind faith and blind obedience to those in charge.

As indicated above, nothing could be further from the truth.

Blind faith, following our leaders blindly without evidence from God is not only naïve, but anti-biblical and anti-Christian. Blind faith is neither God's will nor God's design. God does not want us to repeat something in order to convince ourselves. God does not want us to turn off our brains and believe. As CS Lewis stated, forcing ourselves to believe something against the evidence would be “merely stupid.”¹³⁰

Indeed, God has given us our brains for a reason, so we should use them. Churches, leaders, or others who claim to speak in the name of God and ask you to just trust them should not be followed. However, as CS Lewis points out, *after* we have that reason and that evidence, once we have that faith

¹³⁰ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 77.

based on evidence, then our emotions should not affect our actions and our faith. We should remain true to that evidence despite whatever temptations or trials face us.

The Book of Mormon Promise = Evidence?

An active member of the Church might have a problem with the above allegation that they are to blindly follow. One might argue that they are regularly counseled by their leaders to pray about the things that they have heard and receive “confirmations” for themselves that such is from the Lord. Indeed, the Book of Mormon makes such a promise, promising that if we ask God whether the Book of Mormon is true, he will answer in the affirmative.¹³¹ Joseph Smith taught and Mormon scriptures confirm that such prayers to God will often lead to a “burning in the bosom,” which then confirms what is true.¹³² The Church regularly uses this confirmation as proof that everything else in Mormonism is true. Former President Thomas S. Monson taught:

Whether you are 12 or 112—or anywhere in between—you can know for yourself that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. Read the Book of Mormon. Ponder its teachings. Ask Heavenly Father if it is true. We have the promise that “if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.” And once you know that the Book of Mormon is true, then it will follow that Joseph Smith was a prophet of

¹³¹ Book of Mormon, Moroni 10:4.

¹³² Doctrine and Covenants, 9:8 (“But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.”).

God. You will have that burning testimony and knowledge that this church is true.¹³³

Indeed, the Church uses this “feeling” philosophy in everything, except for when it comes to directions from your leaders. Modern prophets trump your feelings every time. As one of the “Doctrinal Master Core Doctrines,” the prophets, specifically the Church’s modern prophets, are God’s mouthpieces and what they say is scripture, even if it appears to contradict prior prophets, contradict the Bible, and sometimes even contradicts the Book of Mormon. The Church teaches that “[w]e sustain the President of the Church as a prophet, seer, and revelator and as the only person on the earth who receives revelation to guide the entire Church. If we faithfully receive and obey the teachings of the President of the Church, God will bless us to overcome deception and evil (see D&C 21:4–6).”¹³⁴

In other words, if you pray about something and get a different answer, then you’re wrong; it is as simple as that, further stating, “[w]hile God gives revelation through prophets to guide all of His children, individuals can receive revelation to help them with their specific needs, responsibilities, and questions and to help strengthen their testimonies. However, personal inspiration from the Lord will never contradict the revelation God gives through His prophets.”¹³⁵ In other words, *and I realize this may sounds harsh, but I believe it to be accurate*, growing up in the Church we are taught to just trust

¹³³ You Can Know It Is True, President Thomas S. Monson, *available at*: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/you-can-know?lang=eng>.

¹³⁴ Prophets and Revelation, Doctrinal Mastery Core Document 5. *available at*: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/doctrinal-mastery-core-document-2018/doctrinal-topics/5-prophets-and-revelation?lang=eng>.

¹³⁵ *Id.*

your feelings and ignore the lack of evidence or even evidence to the contrary, unless your feelings contradicts what the leaders are saying; then just blindly follow.

The real problem with accepting feelings as evidence is that feelings come and feelings go, and are often affected by the weather, our family, personal issues, our own desires, or a myriad of other facts that have no evidentiary basis. I remember growing up frustrated, praying for decades to know that the Book of Mormon was true, always walking away feeling nothing. I had heard glorious testimonies of other individuals who claimed to have received a strong confirmation from the Holy Spirit that the Book of Mormon was true. Yet there I was, time and time again on my knees, only feeling continued silence. I never thought to accept the silence as a “no,” but rather a requirement that I try again at a later date or get more righteous so God will listen. Even serving as a missionary for the Church, I still had never had any spiritual confirmation that the Book of Mormon or the Church was true, yet there I was, a young and naïve man, reiterating the identical testimony of many Mormon five-year-old children that “I knew” such things were true. I believe I am not the only Mormon to be in that situation. In fact, after leaving Mormonism and discussing with colleagues who had also left, I found that none of them ever had this “burning bosom” or anything along those lines.

An active Mormon could and would probably dismiss these statements, justifying themselves by claiming that I simply did not have enough faith, didn’t really want to know, or perhaps was sinning such that I couldn’t hear the voice of the Lord. Indeed, I had to ask myself those same questions after decades of silence about the Book of Mormon. However, that reiterates the entire problem with using “feelings” as evidence. Feelings are entirely subjective, and anyone can claim they “felt” that is what God said and there is no way to

prove otherwise. Members of the “fundamentalist” polygamist cults who broke off from Mormonism will tell you that they felt God was leading them this way. I’m sure those who broke off to form the RLDS (now Community of Christ) church “felt” that is what God wanted of them.

And how can you rebut such feelings? You can’t. Put simply: feelings trump *actual* evidence.

Unfortunately, this is reiterated over and over. For example, even though the hard evidence contradicts any possibility of the Book of Abraham being anything more than creative fiction, we are told by the Church:

The veracity and value of the book of Abraham cannot be settled by scholarly debate concerning the book’s translation and historicity. The book’s status as scripture lies in the eternal truths it teaches and the powerful spirit it conveys. The book of Abraham imparts profound truths about the nature of God, His relationship to us as His children, and the purpose of this mortal life. The truth of the book of Abraham is ultimately found through careful study of its teachings, sincere prayer, and the confirmation of the Spirit.¹³⁶

In other words, even if the people “translating” the scrolls lied about the translation process, even if the “translation” itself is unsupported by a single word in the scrolls, we need not be worried about that. We just need to focus on the message that appears to have been fabricated, and

¹³⁶ Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham, available at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>.

as long as we receive “confirmation” by the spirit, then we can trust it to be true.

Conclusion

I know this has been quoted twice already in this chapter, but even as I write this, the words CS Lewis continue to resound in my head: “And if he thought the evidence bad but tried to force himself to believe in spite of it, that would be merely stupid.”¹³⁷

This is how, unfortunately, the Church attempts to justify the Book of Mormon or any other failings in its history: pray about it. In 2000 the Church put out an article entitled “Mounting Evidence for the Book of Mormon.” The article largely relies on its own internal evidence for “proof” of its truth, pointing out how quickly it was “translated” (again, relying on the testimonies of Joseph and other surrounding him and ignoring large gaps in time), and returning to the ongoing claim that Joseph was simply a small-town boy who was incapable of producing such a work (though I personally think he was a natural genius). Emphasizing feelings over actual evidence, it reiterates that:

[S]cholarship does not replace spiritual witness as a source of testimony. As Elder B. H. Roberts (1857–1933) of the Seventy said, “[t]he power of the Holy Ghost ... must ever be the chief source of evidence for the Book of Mormon. All other evidence is secondary. ... No arrangement of evidence, however skillfully ordered; no argument, however adroitly made, can ever take its place.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 77.

¹³⁸ *Mounting Evidence for the Book of Mormon*, Daniel C. Peterson, published in the January 2000 *Ensign*, available at:

As you can see, this is virtually the same language utilized to justify the Book of Abraham. In other words, the evidence may be lacking, against it, or there may be no tangible external evidence to support it, but just trust in the Holy Spirit and you will know it is true. And if you do not get an answer from the Holy Spirit that it is true, *just keep trying*.

As we have discussed this methodology is improper, anti-biblical, and not from God. It is not Christian. God does not want blind faith; God has given us proofs, sufficient for us to have faith Him.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2000/01/mounting-evidence-for-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>

Chapter 8: Evidence

Like you, I suspect, I wanted *real* support for what I was going to believe. If I was going to involve myself with any group, any ideology, or any religion, I wanted what I believed in to be based on evidence and, gulp, *even science*. I was not willing to go in blind and wanted to be assured that I was heading in the right direction before I invested too much time and emotion into anything.

Before we get into the nitty gritty, we need to discuss the different kinds of evidence for the different types of things we are trying to prove. The two primary types of evidence we will be using are historical and scientific. In my experience as an attorney, I am often diving between the two forms of evidence. Each have their own purpose, and each can provide proofs that the other cannot.

For example, let's say I have a new lawsuit, and the primary issues surround an altercation between two co-workers: Charles and Sean. In this scenario, Charles is claiming that he was hit by a steel pipe in the head, as a result from a brutal, unprovoked attack from Sean. Charles claims that ever since the attack, he has been having splitting migraines, double-vision, and difficulty speaking. Sean, on the other hand, claims that he was merely defending himself. Sean claims that he reported to work and upon walking out of the breakroom, he was jumped on by Charles, who shouted something about Sean stealing some money from him. Sean claimed that he never hit Charles with a pipe, but did throw him off of his back and ran to tell his manager. Sean thinks Charles could have hit something on the way down.

If we analyze these simple facts, we can identify the issues that need to be addressed. Primarily, we need to know:

- 1) Which version of facts is supported by the evidence? In other words, did Sean attack Charles unprovoked, and if so, did he hit Charles with a pipe? If Sean did hit him with a pipe, where on the body did he hit him? Alternatively, did Sean defend himself against an attack from Sean? If so, what happened?
- 2) What is the source of the symptoms identified by Charles? What extent of injury, if any, did Charles actually suffer?

Looking at this hypothetical, we see the need for both historical and medical/scientific evidence. For the first issue, only historical evidence will do. We will need to interview witnesses, interview both parties, see if there happens to be security camera footage, and investigate, if possible, the scene of the incident. This information should assist with determining what, exactly, happened. There would be both internal and external historical evidence. In other words, I would depose Charles and get his official version of events. I would interview him about what happened, what he was doing before, and whether there was anything having to do with money, as alleged by Sean. If Charles contradicted himself, if his story changed as the deposition progressed, then the internal evidence alone may be sufficient to defeat his claims of an attack by Sean. He could lose all credibility and the case could fall apart after just one deposition. I would perform the same actions with Sean to determine the internal validity of his story as well. Additionally, I would obtain external evidence. If, for example, there happened to be an eyewitness, and that eyewitness provided reliable testimony one way or the other, that external evidence would be weighed with the internal evidence of the parties, and considered as a whole

Regarding the second issue, the extent of injury, it would be a mixture of medical/scientific evidence as well as

historical. We would want to examine the medical records, have a medical analysis, and determine the extent of injury and the source of that injury. Although Charles claims to be suffering from a variety of symptoms, we would want to determine whether the medical evidence supports those symptoms based on the type of injury he had. If Charles was treating for chronic migraines days before this incident, then it is less probable that this incident caused those migraines. Further, if he was hit lightly on the head and there was no external evidence of an injury, such as a laceration, bruising, bleeding, etc., then perhaps such a blow would not be medically probable to cause an injury. This, as you can see, is a mixture of both historical and medical/scientific evidence. Each type of evidence has its own purpose, and neither is better than the other.

As you can see from the hypothetical above, if someone came to you and said, “prove that Jesus was the Messiah with science,” there is nothing you could do. Science doesn’t prove the existence or actions of historical figures. You could easily ask him to prove that Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves by science. It could not be done. Pointing to the Emancipation Proclamation is historical, not scientific. Thus, for scenarios such as the life and existence of people, you have to look to historical evidence.

With this in mind, let us begin our analysis.

While there are certainly more areas we could critique and analyze, I believe providing evidence for the following questions meets the purposes of this book.

- 1) Evidence for God/Creator
- 2) Evidence for Jesus’ existence
- 3) Evidence for Jesus as the Messiah
- 4) Evidence for the Reliability of the Bible

Evidence for God

In my experience with others leaving the Church, so many go astray—really astray. They abandon any form of religion, they abandon Christ, and they even abandon the belief in God, wandering into areas bordering between agnosticism and atheism. They have traded one lie for an even bigger lie. They have traded the ideas of men mingled with scripture for *just* the ideas of men. Because their very foundations were shaken, they have nothing to stand on and now seem adrift, or secretly adrift but unsuccessfully attempting to appear as though they have it all together.

I believe you could use both historical and scientific evidence for proof of God. However, for me personally, I always prefer the strongest form of evidence. In my area of practice, virtually all the work I do is in the form of a trial directly before a judge with no jury. Evidence is presented to the judge and the judge rules on that evidence and renders a verdict based on the evidence and arguments by both sides. Although sometimes I take the approach of “the more the better,” and try to overwhelm the judge with a tidal wave of evidence, often I recognize that the judge’s time is valuable and he or she is, frankly, going to get bored with too much evidence. In those cases, I narrow it down and present the strongest arguments and evidence possible, excluding the less persuasive evidence available.

When it comes to the existence of God, you could interview witnesses, take statements from people who have supposedly seen God and try to present that evidence at trial. However, I would not find that evidence particularly persuasive. Why not? Well, as a Christian, most of the people who have seen God, or the glory of God, like Moses, are dead. The ones who are still living and claim to have seen him recently tend to not be extremely credible. So, in this case, I

believe the scientific evidence should be the initial focus for the existence of God.

It is a dramatic understatement to say that there is a lot of scientific evidence for God. There are volumes of scientific literature written by people much smarter than this author. I could present a tidal wave of evidence that would overwhelm and probably bore you to death. However, among some of the literature, there are several common and extremely strong arguments supporting the evidence for the existence and involvement of God in this world. I do not believe you need to go through every argument out there. For me, these were some of the stronger arguments and sufficient scientific evidence for me to be satisfied that God exists and that He created this world. I will present these arguments to you and attempt to do so as concisely and clearly as possible. If you find these arguments less than satisfactory, or if you are one blessed with a scientific mind and a good attention span, I'll provide additional references in the Appendix.

Teleological Argument

This is sometimes coined the “design argument,” as it is essentially an argument for intelligent design. In other words, it was not just happenstance that the earth was created and is supportive of life. There are characteristics of the earth and the environment which, if altered even slightly, would render the planet entirely uninhabitable. Thus, the argument is that someone or something must have organized the planet into such a perfect position and according to a perfect design in order for life to exist.

There are over a hundred criteria, any one of which, if altered, would make life impossible on this planet. We could go through all of them, but such would be overwhelming and not the purpose of the book. However, to give you a resource

for further research and to introduce you to this argument, some of the evidences are as follows:

Sun/Earth Distance and Mass: If the sun was at all larger or more massive than it is, then it would burn too erratically in order to support life on the earth. Further, if the earth were even slightly closer to the sun, then life could not be supported; the gravitational pull would be affected, affecting the rotation of the earth, causing portions of the earth to essentially burn up and others to remain too cold to support life.

Jupiter's Interference: If Jupiter did not exist and was not as massive as it is, the earth would be pummeled up to a thousand times more than it is by asteroids and comets. This would prevent life from being able to thrive on the earth, with the surface and the atmosphere being destroyed entirely. Further, Jupiter is the perfect distance from the earth. Not only does its distance from the earth provide for the right interference from space debris, but if it were any closer to the earth, it would pull the earth out of its stable orbit and cause an erratic atmosphere and significant other problems to prevent life on earth.

Moon/Axis: The earth has a perfect moon that is the perfect distance from the earth. Not only does the moon prevent the earth from rotating too quickly, but it helps keep the earth's axis at the perfect tilt to support life on the planet and to support the seasons, avoiding extreme temperatures on the earth. If the moon

was larger or the distances was greater, again, life would not be viable on the earth.

This is just three of the teleological arguments for an intelligent design, and thus, an intelligent designer. Astrophysicist Hugh Ross identified **122 constants** that were needed in order for life to exist on any planet. *Remember, I just gave you three.* Using this number, he determined that the odds of these constants all being present on any given planet by chance would come to a staggering 10 to the 138 power (10^{138}).¹³⁹ In other words, there is basically no chance that this earth just “happened” out of chaos. I would not go to Vegas with those odds, yet that is exactly what atheists attempt to do.

Moral Argument

This argument is neither scientific or historical, but I suppose would fall into an additional category of philosophical evidence or logical evidence. I have asked some friends who left the Church how they planned to raise their children. One response is fairly common: they intend to raise their children to be “moral people,” but to not have any focus upon “a god.” One of my friends has pointed out that morality has shifted with each generation, pointing out that the Romans of the day had a very different view of morality than we do today. Unfortunately, my friends who have adopted this theory have failed to recognize that this very acknowledgment addresses the problem with morality. If there is no external source of morality, *then there is no such thing as morality*: only shifting desires that could change any minute.

For example, if I held up my friend at gunpoint and took his money and property, he would surely claim that such was wrong. Indeed, most of my same friends who now embrace atheism could read the previous excerpt from his

¹³⁹ Hugh Ross, *Why I Believe in Divine Creation*, 138-141.

discourse and easily recognize how *wrong* Brigham Young was and how horrible his words and actions were. However, using this philosophy, their judgment has no basis; there is no wrong, only actions and personal preferences. It was my preference that I wanted his money. I could argue that a lion takes down and consumes its prey for its own good. Why is it any more wrong that I rob him of his livelihood in order to sustain mine? Brigham Young used his power and influence to get more women and property, and under this philosophy, without God, such should be perfectly acceptable or at least neutral.

Thus, even though many deny a true standard of right and wrong, deep down, they still know it is there and when it affects them personally, they are more likely to recognize their own trap. Because there is a true standard, that standard has to come from somewhere outside of ourselves, from *someone* outside of our environment.

One of the earliest apologists I would consider is CS Lewis, and he emphasized this point in his book *Mere Christianity*.

Everyone has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kind of things they say. They say things like this: 'How'd you like it if anyone did the same thing to you?'—'That's my seat, I was there first'—'Leave him alone, he isn't doing you any harm'—'Why should you shove in first?'—'Give me a hit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine'— 'Come on, you promised.' People say things like that every

day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man's behaviour does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behaviour which he expects the other man to know about. And the other man very seldom replies 'To hell with your standard.' Nearly always he tries to make out that what he has been doing does not really go against the standard, or that if it does there is some special excuse. He pretends there is some special reason in this particular case why the person who took the seat first should not keep it, or that things were quite different when he was given the bit of orange, or that something has turned up which lets him off keeping his promise. It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behaviour or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed. And they have. If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not quarrel in the human sense of the word. Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a

foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.¹⁴⁰

Again, despite some slight shifting in acceptable or unacceptable behavior in some minimal respects, there is within us an *inherent* knowledge of what is good and what is evil. We know what we are supposed to be doing, even when we do not do it. Although people, and even civilizations, can convince themselves that their circumstance is different or that “times have changed,” when it affects them personally, they usually insist on an outside standard that everyone deep-down acknowledges.

In their book, “I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist,” (a book that I highly recommend for further evidence and which has been a great resource for me) Normal Geisler and Frank Turek presented an example that I believe best sums up this moralistic argument:

A professor at a major university in Indiana ... who was teaching a class in ethics, assigned a term paper to his students. He told the students to write on any ethical topic of their choice, requiring each student only to properly back up his or her thesis with reasons and documentation. One student, an atheist, wrote eloquently on the topic of moral relativism. He argued, “All morals are relative; there is no absolute standard of justice or rightness; it’s all a matter of opinion; you like chocolate, I like vanilla,” and so on. His paper provided both his reasons and his documentation. It was the right length, on time, and stylishly presented in a handsome blue

¹⁴⁰ CS. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

folder. After the professor read the entire paper, he wrote on the front cover, “F, I don’t like blue folders!”

When the student got the paper back he was enraged. He stormed into the professor’s office and protested, “‘F! I don’t like blue folders!’ That’s not fair! That’s not right! That’s not just! You didn’t grade the paper on its merits!” Raising his hand to quiet the bombastic student, the professor calmly retorted, “Wait a minute. Hold on. I read a lot of papers. Let me see... Wasn’t your paper the one that said there is no such thing as fairness, rightness, and justice?”

“Yes,” the student answered.

“Then what’s this you say about me not being fair, right, and just?” The professor asked. “Didn’t your paper argue that it’s all a matter of taste? You like chocolate, I like vanilla?” The student replied, “yes, that’s my view.” “Fine, then,” the professor responded. “I don’t like blue. You get an F!” Suddenly the light bulb went on in the student’s head. He realized that he really did believe in moral absolutes. He at least believed in injustice. After all, he was charging his professor with injustice for giving him an F simply because of the color of the folder. That simple fact defeated his entire case for relativism.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Norman L. Geisler, and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, Crossway Books, 2004, pp. 173-174.

Put simply, because there is an external standard of right and wrong, there must be an external source for that standard, *i.e.* God. If the standard is merely internal, then it is of no consequence and can change the weather or your own attitude.

Evidence for Jesus' Existence

Moving logically from the evidence for a God, we then need to focus on why we should believe in the Christian God. Why not Islam? Why not one or some of the Hindu gods? Well, I do not intend to write a discourse on other religions, but suffice it to say, if Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected, then none of the other world religions are true. Again, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and claimed to be “the way, the truth, and the life.” However, if he never existed, then we’ve only arrived at the fact that there is a God, and we would have to investigate all of the other religions of this world to see if they have any real truth in them.

So, let us continue with Christ.

First, there is no dispute that Jesus lived. Although the internet has given a voice to many people who probably should not have one, there are no serious scholars that doubt the fact that Jesus lived. As New Testament Scholar Craig L. Blomberg wrote in “Who was Jesus of Nazareth?": “An inordinate number of websites and blogs make the wholly unjustified claim that Jesus never existed. Biblical scholars and historians who have investigated this issue in detail are virtually unanimous today in rejecting this view, regardless of their theological or ideological perspectives.”¹⁴²

¹⁴² Blomberg, Craig, L. as cited in *Christian Apologetics, A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*, Douglas Groothuis, 2011, p. 438.

Indeed, there is significant evidence *outside* of traditional Christian writings to support that Jesus lived, performed miracles, and was even seen after this death. For example, one such source is the writing of Flavius Josephus, the Romano-Jewish Scholar who lived from 37 AD to 100 AD. He recorded the history of the First Jewish-Roman War and he wrote the “Antiquities of the Jews,” which recorded world history from a Jewish perspective, writing primarily to the Greeks and Romans. In Antiquities of the Jews, regarding Jesus he wrote:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.¹⁴³

To be sure, there is controversy with this passage. Josephus was a Jew, and it seems less likely that he would have included the language that Jesus was the Christ; thus there is speculation that there may have been subsequent interpolation or changes by some Christians; however, there is scholarly consensus that most of the passage is reliable, showing that

¹⁴³ The Works of Josephus, translated by William Whiston, Book 18, Chapter 3, p. 480 ¶3.

Jesus lived and even performed works, and many scholars believe such to be accurate as a whole. However, such scholarly debate is beyond the scope of this book.

Further, Josephus wrote of Jesus in additional passages, which have not been contested and are deemed consistent and valid by virtually all scholars. For example, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, he discusses James, the brother of Jesus:

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.¹⁴⁴

Additionally, in Book 18, Chapter 5 his recount of John the Baptist is quite similar to that in the Gospels:

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the

¹⁴⁴ The Works of Josephus, translated by William Whiston, Book 20, Chapter 9, p. 583 ¶1.

body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.¹⁴⁵

Additionally, we have the writings of Cornelius Tacitus, who was a senator and historian of Rome from 56-120 AD. In his *Annals*, he wrote of Christ. During the time of Nero, the Christians had been getting persecuted for their faith, and were blamed by Emperor Nero for Great Fire of Rome. Tacitus wrote:

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, (Christ) from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.¹⁴⁶

We also have the letter from Pliny the Younger, who was the Roman governor of Bithynia et Pontus (now Turkey) and he wrote a letter around 112 AD requesting guidance on

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* At Book 18, Chapter 5, p. 484, ¶2.

¹⁴⁶ *Annals* 15.44.

dealing with Christians. The letter is quite lengthy, but one of the relevant portions is:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.¹⁴⁷

This is just a sample of the non-religious, external, historical evidence for the existence of Jesus. Frankly, it would be foolish to even consider the argument that Jesus never existed. One simply only need to look at the impact that he had globally, the martyrs of the early Christian faith, and the abundance of internal and external written documents about him to easily acknowledge that he existed. In the words of archaeologist and emeritus professor in Judaic studies at Duke University Eric Meyers, “I don’t know any mainstream scholar who doubts the historicity of Jesus...The details have been debated for centuries, but no one who is serious doubts that he’s a historical figure.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Pliny, Letters, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

¹⁴⁸ National Geographic, “What Archaeology Is Telling Us About the Real Jesus,” December 2017, available at: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/12/jesus-tomb-archaeology/>

This, then, brings you to the bigger question: even if he existed, is he who he claimed to be?

Evidence: Jesus as the Christ

So even if Jesus existed, how can we know what was true? Maybe he was just a man, a moral teacher who started a religion. We could argue the same for Muhammed, Joseph Smith, or other religious leaders in the past.

Except Jesus is different.

Jesus did not say he was a prophet for a god of some sort. He did not claim he saw a vision and was sent to reveal some truths. He said that he was the Son of God and one with God, thus equal to God himself! Thus, Jesus is quite different from any other person in history, regardless of religion. This brings us to the infamous quote from CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity*:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great

human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.¹⁴⁹

Again, Jesus cannot be just some leader; he claimed to be much, much more than that. Thus, he was either a liar, a lunatic, or he was the very person he claimed to be. If he was a lunatic, then one would have expected his fame to have died out very quickly if it ever started at all. If he was a liar, then he was not a “great moral teacher” or even a good person; indeed, he would be evil if he were claiming to be the Son of God and was not. If you do not believe he was evil or a lunatic, then he must be who he said he was.

Smart Liars

I believe continuing the previous comparison to Islam and other faiths is appropriate. Unlike Islam, Mormonism, and other religions, the origin story for Christ and the New Testament, is quite different. Jesus never went out into the wilderness and then claimed to have received some divine revelation from God that he must reveal to all people. The people who did that are asking you to blindly follow them, to trust that their unwitnessed narrative is true. In other words, there is no external proof of anything they say. Mohamed went to a cave; Joseph Smith went to a thicket of woods. Neither had any witnesses. Unlike Mohamed or Joseph Smith, Jesus never claimed to have had an individual revelation from God; indeed, he claimed to *be* God. He never asked you to blindly follow what he said, as demonstrated in the earlier chapters, he

¹⁴⁹ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55-56.

demonstrated everything by proofs. Indeed, the evidence and proof came *before* his declaration as to who he was and is.

In my line of work, I deal with a lot of work-related injuries; people who have been hurt at work and may be entitled to workers' compensation benefits. Sometimes, the cases I'm involved in surround an employee who had a legitimate injury, but there may be a difficulty with the provisioning of disability benefits. In other cases, the work-related injury is disputed entirely. In other words, the employer denies that it even happened and doesn't believe the claims of the employee that he or she got hurt at work; the employer believes the employee is perpetuating a fraud. In general, the claims that are clearly legitimate are not fought and no attorney is needed. I tend to get involved when there is a problem with the claim or when the claim is questioned entirely. In many of the cases that I deal with, there are no witnesses and the employees tend to be fairly questionable people.

The bad employees who are smarter and trying to fake a work-related injury claim they suffered the accident when no one else was around. If there are no witnesses, it is harder to contradict the claims of the employee. For example, a man may allege that he had to go to the back room and that's when he tripped and fell. The individual employee asks you to trust his set of events. In those cases, if I suspect the claim is fraudulent, I have to dig up other evidence to test out my suspicion that he may be lying. I would have to depose the employee, see if he would contradict himself or if I could catch him in a lie to discredit him. I would research his past, see if he has had similar claims previously. I would research his medical records and see if there is any information about pre-existing problems. If I could not come up with something, he would probably end up getting disability benefits and the claim would be deemed compensable.

A few years ago, I had a case involving someone who claimed to have slipped in a stairwell at work and injured her knee. She knew the facility she worked at had security cameras everywhere, so she went to the one place, she believed, had no cameras. She wanted to obtain disability (money) benefits and be taken off of work while she “recovered.” As indicated, generally, it is difficult to refute these allegations. Indeed, in such cases there are no witnesses to say otherwise. In that specific case, however, there happened to be a hidden security camera that captured the whole incident. The video revealed that the employee walked into the stairwell, waited for the door to close behind her, pulled out a plastic cup out of her bag, and she then banged it repeatedly against her own knee in order to cause abrasions and signs as though she had fallen down the staircase and injured her knee. She then put away the cup and laid on the ground and begin to cry out as though she had fallen. Needless to say, she did not get any disability benefits and was terminated immediately. I suspect she was criminally prosecuted as well, but I did not follow the case beyond that.

Unlike Mohamed or Joseph Smith, Jesus never went into the metaphorical stairwell, had an incident, and demanded that you believe him. As already discussed, such belief would amount to blind faith, something that the Bible does not require and even teaches against. Jesus came out and performed miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, and *then* declared that he was the Christ. Jesus never asked you to take his word for it, stating, “[i]f I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”¹⁵⁰ As discussed, the smart false prophets and leaders of religion received their alleged revelations from God in

¹⁵⁰ John 10:37-38 (ESV).

isolation, and they were never foolish enough to make such a bold statement to *be* God, only to have received revelation from him. Historically, the false leaders who claim to be someone divine fizzle out quickly because their divinity can be directly challenged and proven to be false. The false leaders who claim isolated divine revelation are harder to challenge and they often succeed in leading many blindly along.

Jesus's bold claim to be the Son of God *should* have been easily refuted if there were not clear evidence to support it. The Jews did not dispute that the miracles happened, they simply disputed the source or power for those miracles. He claimed to have died and been resurrected; if there was no empty tomb, there should be no Christianity. Interestingly, historically, there has never been a dispute that the tomb was empty. Frankly, if the tomb was not empty, this would have been the easiest way to disprove the claims of Christ. All the Jews would have had to do when the apostles claimed he was resurrected, would be to go to the tomb, roll back the stone, and show his body. However, instead, they came up with excuses for the lack of his body. Indeed, as it is difficult to dispute the existence of Jesus, it is similarly difficult to dispute the fact of the empty tomb. If you research those antagonistic towards the resurrection, the vast majority of arguments they come up with involve allegations of hallucinations or that Jesus didn't die; they don't claim that the tomb had a body in it; the evidence is not there to support that. In the words of D.H. Van Daalen, "It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions."¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ DH Van Daalen, *The Real Resurrection*, Collins, 1972, p. 41

The Change

So, we have an empty tomb, but was there a resurrection? If there was no resurrection, then Christianity is in vain. In the words of Paul, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”¹⁵² During my transition from the Church, I started to read the Bible anew. What really struck me going through the New Testament is how immature and childish the apostles were, until they saw the risen Christ. The transformation from selfish children to benevolent saints who stared death straight in the eyes while they proclaimed the risen Lord cannot be discounted.

When you read each of the Gospels, you see how ignorant and selfish, and well, human, each of the apostles were. For example, you read in Luke 9:46 where the apostles were actually arguing which of them is the greatest. Just a few verses later in 49-50, you find the apostles stopping another from performing miracles in Jesus’ name because he was not part of their clique. In Matthew 16:22-23, after Jesus explained, again, that he was going to suffer and die and then be resurrected, he was contradicted by Peter who said that this “shall never happen to you,” to which the Lord called him Satan and told him to get behind him. Despite claiming that he would be willing to die with him, we have Peter denying even knowing Jesus three times in Luke 22:46-62. In fact, once Jesus was taken, the apostles scattered, all unsure what to do. It was over. In the Gospels we see that the apostles still failed to understand or believe that Jesus would die and be resurrected, and once he was resurrected, some still did not

¹⁵² 1 Corinthians 15:14-17 (ESV).

believe until he appeared to them himself; but then the game changed.¹⁵³

Up until the resurrection, they truly never believed.

After the resurrection, however, each of the apostles was a new person. If one ever wanted to see an example of being born again, being a new creature, it was the apostles after the resurrection. There was no more fighting about being the greatest; they were not to be scattered again. All were immediately willing to die for their newfound faith. In fact, Peter who denied even knowing Jesus after the capture, became an extremely bold evangelist and missionary, and one of the greatest leaders in the church. When he was sentenced to death by crucifixion, he requested that he his head be turned toward the ground because he did not feel worthy to be martyred the same way as Jesus. James, as we saw above confirmed by external evidence (the writings of Josephus), was stoned to death because of his faith. In fact, John is well known to be the *only* disciple to *not* die as a martyr, dying in forced isolation in his old age after composing the book of Revelation. Although the apostles were there to see the evidence of Jesus as a healer, and even as the Christ, once he was risen from the dead it finally, truly, changed them and set up an unbreakable foundation for their faith.

For me personally, this was one of the greatest evidences of the truth of the Bible and of Christ as Lord. These were people who were now willing to die for their faith, when before they ran away at the first real confrontation. Indeed, these were people who *did* die for their faith. While one could certainly argue that there are martyrs in other faiths, one is not likely to be a martyr for something they *know* to be a lie.

¹⁵³ See e.g., Luke 24:10-11, and John 20:24-25.

Does that make sense?

While there are people in many faiths who have died for their beliefs, they did so because they *truly* believed in something, whether that something was a lie or not. However, if they *knew* it was a lie, it is extraordinarily unlikely that they would be willing to die for that cause; and in this case, *all* of the apostles were willing to die for their faith from that day forward.¹⁵⁴

Poor Witnesses?

Although I believe the fact that the apostles changed entirely after the resurrection and then were willing to die for what they had seen is some of the strongest evidence to support the resurrection, there are other valid arguments and evidences as well. Going back to my hypothetical involving the “smart liars,” if you were going to create a fictitious story that you wanted people to believe, and if you were going to identify the witnesses to corroborate your story, then you would want to identify those witnesses who would hold up in court and be supportive of your lie. If you were going to pick a witness, you would not pick Blind Joe or Senile Jake as your key witnesses. The audience you are writing to could very well know these people and know their testimony to be completely unreliable, leaving a gaping hole in your fictional narrative. You would do better coming up with a completely fictional character who will never be able to rebut your story. That didn’t happen; these were all real people who really existed and who stuck with their testimonies.

¹⁵⁴ You may be thinking in the back of your mind, “what about Joseph Smith? He died as a martyr, right?” Well, that is what the Church wants you to believe. Research it for yourself. He was fleeing an attack, there were bullets exchanged, and it was not like one going to the cross. He did not die *for* his faith.

Further, if you were writing as a Jew at that time, you most certainly would not pick a woman as your first and key witness to the resurrection. A woman's testimony was invalid and deemed by society as not credible. The Talmud states that, "these are they which are not qualified [to be witnesses or judges]: A dice player, a usurer, pigeon racers, or traffickers in Seventh Year produce, and slaves. This is the general rule: any testimony for which a woman is not qualified, they too are not qualified."¹⁵⁵ In other words, the testimony of a woman was invalid in court and was equivalent to a gambler or pigeon racer. I did not know you could race pigeons.

Josephus, who we referenced earlier, summarized the value of female testimony as follows:

But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex, nor let servants be admitted to give testimony on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment."¹⁵⁶

Despite the inherent lack of value of the testimony of a woman, the Gospel writers confirmed that women were the first witnesses to Christ. Why, unless it is true, would you make your key witnesses of Christ's resurrection a group of women? Such seems to be an extremely poor tactic if you are trying to perpetuate a lie and convince those around you.

Motivation

In any given lawsuit that I am involved in, there is always one factor that can make or break the case: motivation.

¹⁵⁵ Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 1.8.

¹⁵⁶ Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 4.8.15.

Again, I deal with people who are claiming to have been involved in work-related injuries and claim to be disabled to some extent. It often amazes me how easily people will throw away their honesty and integrity with the proper motivation. If there is some money on the line, often even just a small amount, many will tell egregious lies in support of their allegations and supposed disability. However, once the motivation is no longer there, they tend to go away. I cannot tell you how many people I've seen that were terribly disabled until the very last disability check came in; then somehow, miraculously, they all of a sudden are ready to go back to work and are significantly better.

A few years ago, I had a case where an employee supposedly injured both of his ankles and was very disabled. The medical records all seemed to indicate that he was doing well and had made a good recovery, however, his subjective complaints of pain were off the charts. Even though x-rays and other imaging studies showed that he had recovered, this guy still used a walker everywhere he went and complained that he was in constant pain. We did not believe him, so we sent out surveillance to see if we could catch him in the act. Perhaps we could catch him playing basketball, going for a jog, or even just going for a walk without his walker. Much to our dismay, all the surveillance we obtained just supported his allegations of pain. Everywhere he went, and I mean everywhere, the walker was there. We ended up settling the case for a fairly significant sum of money, closing out all of his claims and benefits and putting a nice check into his bank account. Although we did not trust him, we had no way to prove otherwise. *Miraculously*, just one week after he received our check and deposited it into his bank, he returned to his doctor, claimed he felt amazing and requested that she release him to full duty work so he could accept a high-paying job in the oil

fields, which required a full-duty release. There was no more walker and no more pain.

Miraculous, right? Once we found out about this, we turned him over to the proper authorities to pursue him for fraud.

Lack of worldly motivation (money, sex, power, etc.) is a huge factor supportive of the truth of the Gospel. What, if any, motivation did they have to lie for what they proclaimed? They gave up everything they had to preach the message, only to live their lives in poverty and then die horrific deaths. As we have seen historically, Mohammed rose to power over his alleged revelations. He gained money, women, and power. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young did the same. Joseph Smith set up a counsel of fifty in his hope to be king, and even ran for President of the United States. According to the Church, he had more than a dozen wives. Brigham Young developed a harem of more than 50 women and lived out his life as, essentially, a king in Utah.

The apostles of Christ, however, had *nothing* in this world to gain by their testimonies. They had careers and livelihoods that they gave up following Christ. Indeed, even Paul/Saul had a promising career in Judaism but forsook everything to know Christ. When Christ himself revealed the mission he set for Paul, it wasn't one of glory but of *suffering*, stating, "he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."¹⁵⁷ "I will show him how much he must suffer" doesn't exactly sell me on wanting to be an apostle. However, the very core of Christianity is literally being willing to give up everything this world has to offer, including our own lives, for

¹⁵⁷ Acts 9:15-16 (ESV).

the sake of Christ. While there are certainly late-night televangelists and prosperity preachers who use and abuse Christianity for their own power, Christ, the Son of God, knelt and washed the feet of his disciples, and declared, “[i]f I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Christ affirmed that Christianity does not offer riches, stating that “[i]f anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”¹⁵⁹

True Christianity promises nothing that this world has to offer. There is no promise of health, wealth, or prosperity, only eternal life in the life to come. Christ and the apostles had nothing to gain in this world; such makes the truth of their testimonies significant and a strong piece of evidence that we have to account for.

Evidence: The Bible

So, what about the Bible? It has been handed down from generation to generation. There were no photocopy machines or scanners back then; how can we rely on a text that has been copied by hand for thousands of years? As a Mormon, you only believe in the Bible “as far as it is translated correctly.” Growing up in the Church we are taught that it may have been inspired originally, but many of the “plain and precious” truths were lost or taken out, which led to the need for the Book of Mormon, and subsequent doctrines that were “restored.”¹⁶⁰ Frankly, the skepticism that Mormons have for the Bible is similar to most others who are non-Christians and those even antagonistic towards Christianity. Although officially the Church regards the Bible as scripture, I grew up

¹⁵⁸ John 13:14-16 (ESV).

¹⁵⁹ Mark 9:35 (ESV).

¹⁶⁰ 1 Nephi 13:28.

hearing members of the Church use the same tactics that non-Christians used to attack the Bible, generally pointing out that with thousands of copies, there had to be errors, whether they be inadvertent or purposeful. The analogy I have heard most often is like children playing the “telephone game,” where the final result is often quite different from the original product.

However, is that fair?

If you know nothing about the copying process, can you say that this process doubtlessly led to inaccuracies? Admittedly, I had accepted this “unreliable Bible” theory without much thought most of my life. I mean, how could something be copied accurately by multiple people over generations and still come through intact? As a Mormon, this is one of the many reasons why I trusted the Book of Mormon more than the Bible; the Book of Mormon supposedly came directly from God to Joseph, and then to us, so there weren’t generations of copies being made that could be erroneous.

However, after researching the history of the Bible, including several books describing the painstaking process that was taken to ensure accurate reproduction, including the sources available to confirm the accuracy of the text, what you will see is that the evidence is clear to support an accurate reproduction of the original works.

I do not believe the “telephone game” is even a remotely appropriate metaphor; however, if we had a slightly varied “transcribing game,” I believe we could have a closer comparison.

I will explain.

If the telephone game allowed for the original player to write down the original message and then all subsequent players could look at the message in writing, and then copy

that message verbatim to ensure an accurate transcription before relaying it to the next individual, we could expect a better result, right? What if there were safeguards to ensure accurate copying, such as a character count, ensuring that the handwriting is legible and no letters touch each other, and other safeguards along those lines; would you expect an even more accurate result? I would think so. Let us now take this a step further.

What if you had just 10 players per game, and 100 separate games of the transcribing game occurring simultaneously, all starting with the same message. In this example, all players are allowed to write down the information given to them, all players are instructed to follow procedural safeguards, and after the game is complete, you can compare any of the transcriptions from any of the other games, except for those from the first round or two. In other words, the first two transcriptions are not available to you, but the remaining 8 are available and you can compare any of the 8 transcriptions in one game with any of the 8 transcriptions in the other 100 games. That gives you the ability to compare one transcription with another 799 to verify accuracy. Would that help reduce the chance of error? Absolutely.

For example, if the original message was “I like hamburgers with pickles,” and you grab the final transcript from all 100 games, and 98 of them say, “I like hamburgers with pickles,” and two say “I like cheeseburgers with pickles,” you know something happened among two of the transcription chains, and you can then trace those statements back through the chain of transcriptions, find where the error occurred, and then disregard those copies and anything copied from those copies. Does that help to ensure accuracy? Clearly, yes.

As you will see, such is the case with the Bible.

There wasn't just one early manuscript that was subject to error and deterioration that happened to be copied; there were and are thousands of manuscripts which can be compared to each other to determine whether there are any outliers that may be in error. Thus, to determine the reliability of the transmission process and the Bible as a whole, we need to look at first, the translation process, and second, compare our oldest manuscripts with the newest. Perhaps we'll find a "nefarious monk" who improperly transcribed cheeseburgers into the process, or perhaps we'll find an identical or nearly-identical transcription and can then come to the conclusion that there were no "plain and precious truths" lost during the process, that it still "proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew," and that it still contains "the fulness of the gospel of the Lord."¹⁶¹

Accuracy of the Manuscripts

To begin, specifically with the Old Testament process, the scribe would take the original or earlier manuscript and would use only new animal skins for preparing the manuscript. The skin was meticulously prepared and marked with gridlines to ensure a proper flow of the text and to allow for proofing. The scribe had to use a special formula of black ink, and only that ink for the entire text. The scribe was also required to orally pronounce/speak every word that he wrote when it was written. There would be a proofreader at the end who would count the letters, words, and paragraphs. The proofreader knew which paragraph, letter, and word would be in the very middle of the entire manuscript, and he would verify such was correct before giving approval. If any two letters touched each other, the document was invalidated. The document had to be stored and preserved in a holy place. Imagine how long the telephone/transcribing game would last with such an arduous

¹⁶¹ 1 Nephi 13:24.

process! Consider also how less likely it is that there would be an error in any final transcript.

When it comes to the New Testament, there were not the same scribal safeguards in process, though much of the copying was performed by professionals (i.e. monks... *gasp*) and the quality control was quite high. The text would be dictated, and multiple individuals would copy the text as it was being dictated and then they would compare the texts to ensure accuracy. This process led to the ability to create multiple copies all at once and this process, no doubt, has led to the fact that today we have over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts, over 10,000 Latin manuscripts, and over 9,300 manuscripts in other languages (i.e. Syriac, Armenian, Gothic). These manuscripts range from 125 AD to the Fifth Century. Considering the New Testament was likely written sometime between 45 and 90 AD, there is not a large gap from the original writing to the earliest manuscripts still in existence.

Again, I want to emphasize what procedural safeguards there were, and why we can trust the final text we have today. In regard to the Old Testament, there were extreme safeguards taken for every single copy. For the New Testament, the sheer volume of texts is one of its strongest safeguards.

I will give you another example.

Suppose I attended a seminar with a thousand other people, and we were to transcribe every single word the speaker said. The speaker spoke slowly, allowing sufficient time for everyone to take down his words. At the end of the seminar, we all had to turn our transcripts over to a group of individuals who were then going to print a book, providing exactly what the speaker said. While there may be slight

variances between some of the transcripts from the thousand attendees, those putting the book together have 999 transcripts they can compare against any one transcript to determine what was actually stated. If 997 say one thing, and three have some slight variance, then they easily know there was a mistake with those three transcripts. Such it was with our New Testament!

Another test would be to find our oldest manuscript, compare it to what we have today and see if there were any variations. If we can find a transcript that is a thousand years old or older, and it is virtually identical to the text we have today, then it is a logical assumption that the first period of time likely maintained an equal amount of accuracy.

So, what do we have? Well, we have really, really old transcripts, and a lot of them. Regarding the Old Testament, we have the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written sometime between 150 BC and 70 AD. When you compare the modern translations of the Old Testament to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we have essentially an identical copy. Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer, actually examined the two Isaiah scrolls and wrote, “[e]ven though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.”¹⁶² Regarding the New Testament, the number of manuscripts, as described earlier, is overwhelming. Further, we still have in existence

¹⁶² Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1985), 25.

today manuscripts dating back to 130 AD, all supporting the reliability and accuracy of our modern translations.¹⁶³

Conclusion

I hope this helps. I really do. However, I want to point out that this is not a book on Christian Apologetics. I am not writing to prove Christianity is true. I am not a biblical, historical, or archeological scholar of any kind. There are resources available that show in significantly greater detail the archeological and historical evidences that support the Christian faith. *My purpose in providing this information is to show you that you do not have to have blind faith.* Christianity does not require your ignorance. Christianity does not require you to rely on a “burning bosom” for belief in it. Research the evidence for yourself so that you can be intellectually satisfied and on solid ground. I have. There is sufficient evidence that I am convinced not only spiritually, but intellectually that Christ rose from the dead and that he is waiting with open arms for anyone, anyone, *including you and me*, to come to him.

I encourage you, however, to do your research. Again, I have provided some references in the Appendix to this book that would make a great starting point. If the evidence for the truth of Christianity is a peach, I have just let you lick the fuzz; there is so much more out there.

¹⁶³ See McDowell, Josh and Sean, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, 47-52, Thomas Nelson 2017.

Chapter 9: Crazy Christians/Faith v. Works

So now I was in another place in my journey. Although I had a sufficient evidence to believe in God, in Jesus Christ, and even to believe in the reliability of the Bible, I still had many questions about Christian beliefs. Growing up a Mormon, I had a lot of ideas about what Christians believed, and I certainly had the Bible to give me a good idea, but there were things that I had heard of which, frankly, never made sense. When it came down to the old “faith versus works” battle, the Christian perception always seemed skewed and, well, quite lazy.

As a missionary for the Church, I vividly recall getting into tense theological debates with born-again Christians. I would go door-to-door as a missionary, trying to get people to listen to my message. The born-again Christians were always willing to open their doors, but it was virtually always to debate our theology. While they were always nice, there was often still a sense of hostility in their voices. It was probably in ours as well. I began to dread seeing the fish symbol as a missionary, because this I knew that if I spoke to this person, it would end up being a debate and they would refuse to see the “truth.” I even remember calling it the “evil fishy,” when I would see it on the back of someone’s bumper or on the front of their small business. Growing up Mormon, I had no idea what the symbol of the fish meant, I just knew I didn’t like the people bearing it. I never understood them. How could those crazy “Christians” possibly think that just saying a little prayer was enough for salvation? Here I am, sweating in 102-degree summers in California performing hard work to share the message, and they think they just have to say some crummy prayer and that’s all God requires. How could *that* be possible?

As described earlier, the Church routinely touts its works and ordinances as things that are necessary for salvation.¹⁶⁴ In fact, these works, authority, and ordinances are so essential that many would believe it preposterous to be saved by grace alone. The Church relies heavily on James, who emphasized that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed, in its own canon, the very purpose of this earth is for it to be a testing ground to see if we are going to obey or not! In Abraham 3:24-25, it reads, “We will make an earth whereon these may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, *to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.*”

For most of my life I thought that other “Christians” believed that they simply had to say a prayer of belief, verbally make it official that Jesus was their Lord and Savior, and then all was sufficient; they were saved, and they could go on sinning or doing whatever they wanted with their lives. Honestly, this was one of the things that kept me away from “mainstream” Christianity for a time. I felt that there was no way God would simply forgive us and save us simply by saying a little heartless prayer.

What I ultimately learned, unfortunately, is that my line of thinking was not entirely incorrect; there *are* many who profess to be Christians who believe this. However, what I also found out, is that this is almost universally rejected by the

¹⁶⁴ Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Ordinances: Administration of Ordinances, available at: <https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Oordinances> (“Ordinances that are essential to salvation must be performed under the direction of those who hold the keys to assign the administration. The validity of ordinances performed, and their divine ratification or sealing, require this approval.”); *see also*, D&C 84:20-21 (“Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh.”).

¹⁶⁵ James 2:17 (ESV).

majority of active Christians. Those who attend more than Easter and Christmas services or who really study their Bible have recognized that believing in Christ is more than just a simple acknowledgment. It is more than a mental and verbal assent. It means turning yourself over to him, trusting him, relying on him, finding joy in him, and letting him have his way in your life.

Kyle Idleman, in his book “Not a Fan. Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus,” reiterates this idea. He points out that Christians have often attempted to “sell Jesus” in order to attract more members. He likened such preachers to late-night infomercials that point out all the highlights like forgiveness from our sins, eternal life, etc., while leaving out the need for any sacrifice on part of the individual accepting Christ. The people signing up for such a religion “ordered a gospel that cost them nothing and offered them everything.”¹⁶⁶ However, he reiterates that such a shallow conviction will not produce salvation:

So in case someone left it out or forgot to mention it when they explained what it meant to be a Christian, let me be clear: There is no forgiveness without repentance. There is no salvation without surrender. There is no life without death. There is no believing without committing.¹⁶⁷

Further, he points out that there is a significant difference between a mere mental or verbal acknowledgement form of belief, and the belief that is truly required by Christ to be a real follower and to have the salvation he freely gives. As

¹⁶⁶ Idleman, Kyle, “Not a Fan. Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus,” Zondervan, 2011, 2016, p. 35.

¹⁶⁷ *Id.*

we find reiterated in James, believing that does not produce obedience is not really believing; it is not true faith.

If you read through the four Gospels that tell of Christ's life, you'll find that Jesus says "Believe in me" about five times. But care to guess how many times Jesus said "Follow Me"? About twenty times. Now I'm not saying that following is more important than believing. What I am saying is that the two are firmly connected. They are the heart and lungs of faith. One can't live without the other. If you try and separate the message of follow from the message of belief, belief dies in the process. Our churches will continue to be full of fans until we bring together these words that should never have been separated to begin with. Following is part of believing. To truly believe is to follow.¹⁶⁸

This teaching is echoed, preached, and believed throughout Christianity, I would argue, by most Christians. Unfortunately, the televangelists, the late-night preachers, and the occasional low-budget Christian movie often make up a Mormon's entire exposure to "Christianity." I've seen more than one movie where the anti-Christ villain is on his way to do more damage when he's involved in a motor-vehicle accident or hit by lightning and there happens to be some Christian nearby who gets him to profess Jesus as Lord and Savior immediately before he dies. Phew! He sure dodged a bullet there!¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ *Id.* at p. 32-33.

¹⁶⁹ Don't get me wrong. I know about the thief on the cross, and there is no way for a man to truly judge another's heart; only God does that. However, *some* Christians also take the thief on the cross to the extreme

However, as we will discuss, the belief of personal sacrifice and complete devotion to Christ are in the *very core* of Christianity.

We read a similar analysis from John Piper in his book *Desiring God*:

No one is a Christian who does not embrace Jesus gladly as his most valued treasure, and then pursue the fullness of that joy in Christ that honors Him. Someone may ask, “If your aim is conversion, why don’t you just use the straight-forward, biblical command ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:31)? ... My answer has two parts. First, we are surrounded by unconverted people who think they *do* believe in Jesus. Drunks on the street say they believe. Unmarried couples sleeping together say they believe. Elderly people who haven’t sought worship or fellowship for forty years say they believe. All kinds of lukewarm, world-loving church attenders say they believe. The world abounds with millions of unconverted people who say they believe in Jesus. It does no good to tell these people to believe in the Lord Jesus. The phrase is empty. My responsibility as a preacher of the gospel and a teacher in the church is not to preserve and repeat cherished biblical sentences, but to pierce the heart with biblical truth... In recent years I have asked, “Do you receive Jesus as your *Treasure*?” Not just *Savior* (everybody wants out of hell, but

and exploit this example to a mere verbal acknowledgement as sufficient for salvation.

not to be with Jesus). Not just Lord (they might submit begrudgingly). The key is: Do you treasure Him more than everything?¹⁷⁰

Clearly, this is more than *just* a prayer.

This is more than a meaningless recitation that then allows the reciter to resume his or her own chosen way of life.

The Heart

As a former active Mormon responding to the above information, I might say something along the lines, “then there is no difference.” “You believe works must be necessary, so do we.” “You say that you’re saved by grace and that you must have works as evidence of that grace; we say that you do all of the works you can and then grace makes up the difference.” “You’re saying ‘po-tay-toe’ and I’m saying ‘po-tah-toe.’”

However, it is more like “apple versus orange” than may readily be apparent.

Let me explain.

Christ teaches us that he should be our “treasure.” The very words of Christ confirm that we must be willing to sacrifice *everything* for our Savior, otherwise, we are not truly believing; we are not truly accepting him. In Matthew we find the requirement for someone to be a true disciple: Christ says that he must “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow [him].”¹⁷¹

The cross was an instrument of torture and death. Christ was not just saying we must be willing to do unpleasant things. If that were the case, perhaps he would say that we just

¹⁷⁰ John Piper, *Desiring God*, 25th Anniversary Reference Edition, Multnomah Books, 2011, pp. 54-55.

¹⁷¹ Luke 9:23 (ESV).

need to take up our plunger, toilet-snake, ditch-digging shovel, or perhaps some other instrument of potentially unpleasant work. No, he said we need to take up our cross, and we need to do it *every single day*. Christ is not asking for a one-time sacrifice, but a continual “daily” cross bearing. As Paul declared, our true worship is to “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”¹⁷² In other words, in order to be a true disciple, we need to be willing to give up *everything*, even our lives.

Which brings me to the difference: yes, most members of the Church and mainstream or evangelical Christians can agree that works are necessary. However, the Church teaches that works are necessary steps *for* our salvation; the Bible teaches that if we have salvation through Christ; if we have given our lives over to him and been saved through his grace, *then* the works will flow. The works are the evidence of our faith, or as James proclaimed, we need to show our faith *by* our works!¹⁷³

Perhaps an example will help illustrate the difference.

I am a father of four wonderful kids. There are occasions (more often than I would like) where my children *really* want some shiny new toy. We try not to spoil our kids, so we do not go out and buy them new toys except for birthdays and Christmas. However, we do want them to learn the value of working hard, so sometimes we will let them earn one of these toys by doing extra chores around the house: emptying the dishwasher, folding laundry, etc. For purposes of this hypothetical, let’s say my daughter really wants a new doll. We say, “well, that’s going to be twenty chores,” and we present her with a long list of things she can do over the next

¹⁷² Romans 12:1 (CSB).

¹⁷³ James 2:18 (“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my work.”).

couple of weeks to earn this doll. She works hard over the next few weeks and she completes the chores. Perhaps some of the chores were not completed to the level we had hoped, but overall, she *earns* the doll. What has happened here is a transaction. She worked, earned, and received. Works were performed and a benefit *earned*. There is no gratitude expressed by her that we work hard to put a roof over her head, clothe her, feed her, etc. In this example, we acted as a storekeeper and she the customer.

Now let us say I am in the garage painting something I just built for the house. Let us say it is a new bookshelf. My son comes in the garage and asks if he can help. He wants to work with me. I respond, “you don’t have to, you can keep reading your books, or playing with your brother if you want.” He responds, “but Dad, I *want* to help; I want to be with you.” I allow him and we continue painting the bookshelf together.

In both examples, works were performed. My daughter did chores; my son painted. In both examples, there is some sort of reward. My daughter got a new doll, and my son got quality time with Dad and we got a new bookshelf. However, the motivations were completely different. My daughter’s motivation was to earn something. My son’s motivation was out of love and wanting to spend time with Dad.

Which do you think our Father in Heaven wants more?

Which does Jesus Christ require of us?

Christ wants *genuine* faith; *genuine* love for him. Christ does not want a transactional relationship, which unfortunately, is exactly what you probably learned growing up. Indeed, we are promised a transactional relationship in much of the Church’s exclusive scripture. In D&C 82:9-10 we read, “I give unto you directions how you may act before me, that it (your works) may turn to you for your salvation. I, the

Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.” In other words, “here are the chores to earn heaven... I will give you heaven if you do the chores.”

Again, this is not what Christ wants.

The pharisees were *very* good at works; they took every letter of the law extremely, and often irrationally, serious. Like my daughter in the hypothetical example above, they wanted a transactional relationship. They wanted to perform works and get heaven. However, they did not love God. They did not love Christ, and their works were fruitless, *and even standing in the way of their salvation*. As Christ warned his followers, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁷⁴ Indeed, we read in Matthew, that in the last days there will be those people who *did* great works, and yet, they will have never known nor have been known by Jesus; and thus, they will not be saved. In Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV) we read:

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘**I never knew you;** depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

These are people who *did* works and thought they were saved, only to be terribly disappointed at the feet of Christ! As the passage states, these people cast out demons and did “many

¹⁷⁴ Matthew 5:20 (ESV).

mighty works” in the name of Jesus, yet they never knew Christ and he never knew them! This is easily likened to many who may have regularly attended church and have claimed to be a follower of Christ, but never *actually* knew Christ and never actually did the will of the Father!

But wait a second here Chris, you tell me that works aren’t that important, and then you cite me a passage that says those “do the will of the Father” get into heaven? What are you saying?

The key here is relationship. They key here is Christ.

Perhaps another example from Kyle Idleman’s book will help illustrate the difference.

I grew up going to a Christian school. It was a great school, but there were a lot of rules. You couldn’t have your hair over your ears if you were a boy. Girls’ skirts couldn’t be more than a couple of inches above their knees... Now don’t misunderstand what I’m saying, I don’t think any of these rules were wrong or inappropriate. I think it’s fine and good for a school or parents to establish such rules or guidelines. But here’s what happened – a lot of my friends didn’t associate all of those rules and regulations with school. Instead they connected the rules and regulations with being a Christian...When they got older they didn’t like the rules, and because they associated following a bunch of rules with following Jesus, they walked away from both...*when we learn to truly follow Jesus, we find out that obedience to God comes from the inside out.*

*Submission to what God wants for our lives flows naturally out of that relationship.*¹⁷⁵

Certainly, anyone *can* perform good works, even without Christ. There are many of different faiths, including Muslims, Hindus, and others who do many kind and charitable acts. Even painfully wicked people can occasionally do nice things for other people. In other words, it is within their physical capacity to do good things.

However, if we are to do the *will of the Father*, which I believe is the focus of the works here, it *must* be through Christ. As Christ states in John 15:5 (ESV), “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” Did you get that? Without Christ, we can do “nothing.” Unless we “abide” in Christ and unless he abides in us, then we are not doing the will of the Father. In other translations, they chose the term “remains” or “stays” in place of abide. But you get the idea. Unless we remain with Christ, unless we stay with Christ, our works, even our “mighty works,” are insufficient. *However, if we remain in Christ, then we will be “much fruit!”* As you can tell by the word “remain” this means more than a day; this means an everyday devotion to Christ.

God wants more than good works; he wants a good you. He wants more than patient works; he wants a patient you. He wants more than loving works; he wants a loving you. He wants more than faithful works; he wants a faithful you. Of course, a loving, patient, good, and faithful you will perform loving, patient, good, and faithful works; and you will do them for the right reason. I believe this is why Paul emphasized so

¹⁷⁵ Idleman, Kyle, “Not a Fan. Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus,” Zondervan, 2011, 2016, p. 77 (emphasis added).

much the importance of us becoming a new creation in Christ, saying, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”¹⁷⁶ I believe this is also what Paul is referring to when he talks about the fruit of the spirit.

In Galatians we read that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”¹⁷⁷ One of the things that I find interesting about this passage is the singular nature of this sentence. Note, it does not say the “fruits” of the spirit “are.” No, it says that the “fruit...is.” We do not get patience but not kindness. We do not get love but remain with a lack of self-control. We do not get *some* of the fruit. No, if we have the Spirit, we will have all of these things.

Paul continues, “and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” It is *through Christ* that we will be patient, have love, and be kind. Unlike simply doing nice things for other people, having patience, joy, kindness, and peace are not things you can have begrudgingly; you can’t fake patience, joy, or anything else in that list. It is through Christ that we will be sanctified or made holy. On our own, absent an intervention of God, we cannot and never will do this. It is through Christ that the old self will be crucified, and we will be a new creation. Sure, in our wicked state we can still do a good thing or two, we may even have one or two of the instances of the fruit, but we will not *be* good or complete without Christ.

Indeed, and once we are a new creation, not only will we do good works, but according to Paul, we will do **the** good works that God has planned for us. This has been part of God’s

¹⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV).

¹⁷⁷ Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV).

plan all along. In Ephesians 2:10 (CSB) we read, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.” Take note, he’s not just talking in general about good works. He’s talking about specifics which the Father “prepared ahead of time for us to do.”

It Comes Down to Christ

I believe much of this comes down to a significant misunderstanding of the atonement of Christ. When you read much of the literature published by the Church, you will often see many assurances that your sins “can” be washed clean by the atonement of Christ. Under Mormon theology, you go to church every Sunday, take the sacrament, and renew your baptismal covenants. You, again, promise to do better, ask for forgiveness for your latest sins, and to try harder the next week. This is really no different than old testament sacrifices, which were temporary in nature. You would sin and you would perform sacrifices for your various sins, with different sacrifices for different sins. It never ended. However, we learn from Paul, that these sacrifices were done away with by the one final and eternal sacrifice performed by Christ.¹⁷⁸ In other words, it is not just that our sins “can” be washed away, but if we have come to Christ, then they *have* been washed away through his perfect atonement.

This terrible misunderstanding of the atonement removes Christ from the picture and makes our salvation completely of our own works. It is our duty to come in and repent every week and try harder. There is no change of heart, but a reliance on our own works for our salvation. However, the Bible teaches us that Christ has already won the war. Christ has already died and perfected us if we just accept him. If we

¹⁷⁸ Hebrews 10:1-18.

truly accept him into our lives, then our hearts and our lives will be new and we will be a new creation, and then the works which we are seeking to perform will flow naturally.

Recap

To reiterate, there *are* works in Christianity, but the works do not save. The works come as a result of your salvation through Christ, as a result of your becoming a true follower of Christ and your desire to serve him. The works come as a result of your salvation and sanctification through Christ.

The problem is the belief that the works come first. The works, I was always taught, show God that we love Him, and we want to serve Him. I fear that many people will read the same verse of scripture and interpret this very differently: “If you love me, keep my commandments.”¹⁷⁹ Many interpret this as “show that you love me by keeping my commandments.” However, was there any love in the example with my daughter above? No. While I love and adore my daughter completely, in this example, I acted as a storekeeper and she as the customer. Reading it in this manner turns the passage into a transactional relationship: do works; this will show that you love me, and you get heaven. Christians *should* read this passage as “*Because* you love me, you (want to and) will keep my commandments.”

If you truly love someone, your behavior with that person (in this case God) should be unwavering in all circumstances. You have a relationship with that person and even though there may be some ups and downs, you truly love that person and that will not change with the weather or circumstances of life. I believe this is the reason the Bible compares the church (speaking generally to the Christian

¹⁷⁹ John 14:15.

community, not a specific denomination) to the bride and Christ as the bridegroom. In sickness or in health, we stick together. Our bridegroom will always be faithful, indeed, he already died for us. Will we be so faithful? Clearly, with the expectation that we bear our crosses daily for Christ, we must be.

This is my additional fear with the doctrines of the Church. They often teach such a transactional relationship with God, that once the purchaser feels like he or she is not getting a good investment, they pull out entirely.

Let me give you an example.

Since we have mentioned the example with Christ as the bridegroom and the church as the bride, let's continue the marriage analogy. Let us imagine you are sitting in the front row at a traditional wedding. The bride and the groom are standing across from each other, staring each other lovingly in the eyes, when the priest asks the couple to share the vows that they have written for each other. The bride looks at her almost-husband and reads a very poetic vow about how she will always be by his side, love him completely, and she looks forward to their journey through life together. You see the audience tear up a bit. Next, it is the grooms turn. He pulls out a little piece of paper and says, "I love you. I promise to always love you, support you, and always be there for you, so long as you don't get fat, always have dinner prepared by 6:00 PM, and let me hang out with my boys on Friday nights."

Well, he *said* he loved her.

Clearly, there was no real love there. There was only companionship, so long as *his* terms were met. If she didn't satisfy his demands, then he was no longer in that relationship. This is what a transactional relationship looks like, and not the wedding that God has in mind.

I've encountered many of my ex-Mormons who, after leaving the Church, immediately abandon religion all together and do everything they "couldn't do" before. They see this as a fresh start where they can consume all the alcohol they want, get tattoos, be promiscuous, and just have a good time while they enjoy a "break" from God.

Clearly, there was no heart in their former "faith." While they may have showed up to the altar, once they realized that Mormonism wasn't going to give them heaven, they were done. There was no relationship with Christ; there was only ritualistic obedience *to an organization* with expectation of a reward at the end. After the expectation of reward was shattered by learning about the Church's history, they see it as a time to live it up and make up for the past sins they ritualistically avoided. There was never a new creation; there was only an old creation, temporarily restraining itself.

In Hebrews we read that the ritualistic sacrifices in the Old Testament era were there to "sanctify for the purification of the flesh," but, the author continues, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God?"¹⁸⁰

Did you catch that?

This passage was not focusing on his death for our sins, though that is certainly part; the focus was on the sacrifice of Christ cleansing "our consciences *from dead works*" so we can serve God! This is the pattern: we are saved through Christ and our dead works (i.e. our sins, our wickedness, and our legalistic and fruitless works) go away, so the real works of service to and in God can shine forth!

¹⁸⁰ Hebrews 9:13-14 (CSB).

Chapter 10: Crazy Christians/Trinity and Other Issues

After leaving the Church, I began to truly investigate what other Christians believed. Although I *thought* I knew what they believed, virtually everything I thought I knew about the other churches turned out to be incorrect. The Trinity, I thought, made no logical sense. In my mind, I thought most Christians believed in, frankly, a schizophrenic God. In other words, God himself was in heaven, God created the earth, God came down to the earth, God prayed to himself, and when there was a voice out of heaven saying, “this is my beloved son,” this was the same person talking to himself like some sort of ventriloquist. I assumed that Christians believed that when Stephen was stoned, he saw Jesus sitting on the right hand of himself.¹⁸¹

I realize this sounds a bit sarcastic, but that was my perception of how other Christians viewed God. It didn’t help that, while actively Mormon, I discussed the concept of the Trinity to a Catholic woman, one of the wives of one of the attorneys at the firm I worked for. Admittedly, it was at a holiday party for attorneys, and I am pretty sure she was completely hammered by the time the party started. Regardless, when I explained to her why I thought the schizophrenic God idea made no sense, she never denied it, but only responded, “so what difference does it make?”

Our conversation was not particularly fruitful.

The Trinity

Growing up in the Church, I understood that other Christians believed that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the

¹⁸¹ See Acts 7:55.

Holy Ghost (almost never called the Holy Spirit, maintaining that King James tradition) were all one. The Church disagrees with the concept of the Trinity and uses Joseph Smith's First Vision as proof that they are separate beings, as Joseph later claimed to see two separate and distinct individuals.

This statement from Joseph Merrill, one of the former of the Twelve Apostles of the Church accurately sums up this doctrine:

Through misunderstanding and wrong interpretations, the world had lost the correct conception of the *image* and personality of God. To restore the truth, a new revelation was imperative. Though from the beginning to its end, the Bible ... teaches that God is a personal being in whose image we are made, and that the Father and the Son are two separate and distinct personalities, *alike in image* and attributes, yet the modern world, through ignorance and lack of understanding, denies these fundamental truths. And so important are these truths to a satisfying faith that, I think, they are absolutely basic. *Without any concrete conception of the image of God*, how can one develop the necessary faith of the kind that the Apostle James asserts is needed to get an answer to prayer? [see James 1:5–6]. Yes, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are personal beings in whose image man himself is made, so declared Joseph Smith.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Joseph F. Merrill, *Joseph Smith Did See God*, Conference Report, April 1947 (emphasis added).

Growing up in the Church, I was always taught that this was supported by the Bible, for example, we read in John:

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.”¹⁸³

Again, that’s where Joseph Smith claimed that they *looked* exactly alike. As stated above, they were “alike in image and attributes.”¹⁸⁴ In other descriptions of the First Vision, Joseph explained that the personages “exactly resembled each other in features and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon day.”¹⁸⁵ In other words, to the naked eye, they were basically twins. The Church has run with this concept in its imagery and paintings depicting the First Vision. In the painting, “The First Vision,” by Del Parson which is displayed on the wall in many (if not all) Church buildings, and the image used in the booklet I used as a missionary when describing the First Vision, it shows Joseph on the ground, as if rising from his knees. There are two people, dressed in white floating just above him in the air. Both look identical; white hair, white beard, and identical everything. The only way you can tell them apart is that one (the Father) appears to be pointing to the other.

¹⁸³ John 14:8-10 (ESV).

¹⁸⁴ *Id.*

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Smith, *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Alma P. Burton [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977], 274 – 275.

I have two children whose baby pictures are nearly identical. I'm sure as they continue to grow they will look more and more different; but even as their father, I can easily get their baby pictures mixed up. In other words, the Church's interpretation of "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" is that to the physical eye, they look the same. It would be akin to a friend asking me to see a picture of my youngest as a baby. Perhaps I didn't have one with me, so instead I showed him a picture of my older boy and replied, "look at this picture of my oldest boy, my youngest looks just like him so if you've seen one, you've seen the other."

Frankly, this never sat well with me, for two reasons.

First, although my kids do look similar, simply claiming that if they have seen one, then they have seen the other was never satisfactory; indeed, they had not *actually seen the other one*, just someone who looks a lot like him. Second, the focus on this scripture was not actually regarding a physical appearance. The verse immediately prior to this request discusses "knowing" the Father, and it can hardly be said that you *know* someone just by seeing them. It is clear that Phillip was wanting more than an image of the Father; indeed, he was wanting to *know* the Father. Christ goes on to explain that if you know the Son, then you know the Father.

As I was transitioning out of the Church, I decided I would make it my mission to address many of my understandings (misunderstandings) of Christianity, starting with the doctrine of the Trinity. A pastor at a local nondenominational church agreed to meet me for breakfast so we could talk. I cited my concerns and asked him to explain the Trinity to me. He did so, and in the easiest possible terms. He stated that, although it is difficult to fully understand, "the Trinity is like a pizza, sliced three ways. It's one pizza, but there are still three distinct slices."

Well, that didn't sound as bizarre or schizophrenic as I imagined, and was fairly similar to how many Mormons described the "Godhead," which is the term that Mormons use to state that there is one God, but three persons.¹⁸⁶ J.I. Packer, in his book "Knowing God," provides an even better example, without utilizing food. In describing the incarnate Christ, he explains the Trinity and the differing roles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit:

It is the nature of the second person of the Trinity to acknowledge the authority and submit to the good pleasure of the first. That is why he declares himself to be the son and the first person to be his Father. Though coequal with the Father in eternity, power and glory, it is natural to him to play the Son's part and to find all his joy in doing his Father's will, just as it is natural to the first person of the Trinity to plan and initiate the works of the Godhead and natural to the third person to proceed from the Father and the Son to do their joint bidding.¹⁸⁷

Frankly, I think the Church has run amok with its perceived misperception of the Trinity. Even as a Mormon, I certainly would not have had a problem with the pizza analogy. I probably would not have had a problem with the description by Packer. Indeed, even Packer used the term Godhead. The primary difference is that Mormons believe the Father has a body of flesh and bones, whereas Christians believe consistent with John 4:24 that "God is Spirit."

¹⁸⁶ Godhead is also used in general Christianity, as an alternative term for the Trinity.

¹⁸⁷ Packer, JI, *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press 1973, p. 62.

Non-Christians Go to Hell?

This was another difficulty with what I perceived as mainstream Christianity. I believed that all Christians taught that anyone who died without knowing Jesus in this life would go to hell. For the starving child in a foreign nation that never had the opportunity to accept Jesus, or perhaps never even heard of the name Jesus, this did not sound like the decision of a very just God. I could not believe in a God that unjust.

I still vividly recall getting into an argument with an ex-Mormon friend who thought the teachings of the Church were unfair and unjust. I disputed those allegations, pointing out that because Mormons believe in temple worship and baptisms for the dead, it was *more* inclusive and more compassionate than any other Christian church. Indeed, the Mormon Church teaches that baptism is essential for salvation. Thus, those who did not know Jesus in this life and did not have the opportunity to be baptized, could be baptized via proxy by someone living. This was necessary because baptism, as the Church explains, is an earthly ordinance that requires a physical body. Thus, members can be baptized on behalf of those who are dead, and on the other side of the veil (in sort of a paradise or prison prior to judgment) those individuals can choose to accept Jesus and the baptism or reject them. I felt this was extremely inclusive and gave opportunities that were denied by other Christian faiths.

Of course, at the time, I really had done no investigation into what other Christians actually believed. Eventually I learned that baptism, although an outward sign of an inward conversion to Christ, was not actually required of salvation. It is important and we should be baptized, but it doesn't save and is not required for salvation. As described earlier, Jesus baptized no one. Further, in Luke we read of the thief who died on the cross with Christ, who promised him that

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”¹⁸⁸ Obviously, the thief never got baptized – it is Christ alone who saves, not an ordinance or action.

During the same breakfast with the local pastor, I seized every opportunity to pick his brain about all of my perceptions of other Christians, including this question. His answer was significantly less judgmental than I expected. He simply replied, “we don’t know.” He continued, “we know that God is just and that he will judge righteously.” He did not condemn those who did not know Christ to eternal damnation, but simply admitted that God is just. Frankly, I could not ask for more. He further pointed out that the scriptures indicate that we are all judged according to the light we are given, and everyone is given at least some light.¹⁸⁹

Researching on my own, this is probably one of the most common questions addressed to Christians, and most Christians agree with the analysis above. Frankly, I thought CS Lewis, in *Mere Christianity* responded to this same dilemma best, stating:

Here is another thing that used to puzzle me. Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His

¹⁸⁸ Luke 23:43 (ESV).

¹⁸⁹ In Acts 14:16-17 (CSB), Paul and Barnabas are preaching in Lystra, and Paul pointed out that even though God may not have fully revealed His truths in past times, “he did not leave himself without a witness, since he did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” In Romans 1:18-23 (CSB) it is confirmed that we each will be judged according to what we have known, but God’s “eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.”

arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.¹⁹⁰

He continued, pointing out that even if that is our concern, it would be foolish for us to avoid Christianity simply because of this concern, stating:

But in the meantime, if you are worried about the people outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself. Christians are Christ's body, the organism through which He works. Every addition to that body enables Him to do more. If you want to help those outside you must add your own little cell to the body of Christ who alone can help them. Cutting off a man's fingers would be an odd way of getting him to do more work.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 38.

¹⁹¹ *Id.*

Chapter 11: The Relationship

I believe true Christianity requires *significantly* more than what you were probably taught growing up, and at the same time, less, when it comes to salvation. Growing up in the Church we are taught that a Mormon can obtain the Terrestrial Kingdom by accepting Christ and not being a terrible sinner. That's it. A Mormon can obtain the Celestial Kingdom, the highest kingdom as described earlier, simply by "accepting" Christ and following through with the ritual ordinances and works like temple marriage; there does not need to be heart involved. I was guilty of a largely loveless transactional relationship with Christ through most, maybe even all, of my years in the Church. I could follow a set of rules without loving what I was doing. I would do most of the works out of a feeling that "I had to" as opposed to "I wanted to." I wanted a clear conscience with God, but not necessarily a relationship.

As I was leaving the Church, I recognized that *this* was the gap I had felt in my heart all along. It was a gaping hole that could only be filled by Christ, but I hardly knew him. Although I had been checking off the good-Mormon to-do list, I never actively sought to *know* my Savior. I had a "modern-day prophet" and inspired leaders who could, supposedly, give me everything I needed. However, as indicated earlier in this book: it never felt like enough.

What I needed was Christ. I hope if you are reading this book, you've felt that same hole, that same call to something more—that call to Christ.

So how do you get that relationship? How do you go from a transactional, loveless, relationship to one that is filled with love? How do you go from following Christ with your mind to following him with your heart?

To borrow the words of John Piper: How could I “treasure” someone I did not really know?

Well, if we are talking about relationship here, what’s the most important earthy relationship you have? Sorry if I leave out any single people here, but the correct answer probably is your spouse. How did I act when I first met her? Did I pursue her or just passively let things move along? If I just saw her for a couple hours once a week on Sundays, would I be married to her today?

God gives us the formula in his word.

*“You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”*¹⁹²

This is a promise that God has made over and over again in the Bible.

- Deuteronomy 4:29 (ESV): But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.
- Proverbs 8:17 (ESV): I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.
- Acts 17:26-28 (ESV): And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as

¹⁹² Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV).

even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.”

- Luke 11:9 (ESV) And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Continuing the analogy above, I *pursued* my wife. I spent money, weekends, stayed out way too late and went to work exhausted the next day. I spent hours on the phone talking to her about anything and everything; and I *hate* talking on the phone. I bought gifts, attended events that I did not find particularly exciting, but I was happy because I was with her. I was content just being with her. After we had dated for a while, I found how comfortable I was just sitting on the couch with her; she would be grading papers for her high school students she was teaching, while I would be finishing up projects or preparing for a test for my undergrad. We were just happy to be together and spending as much time as we could together.

So, if we want Christ, we need to pursue him; we need to seek him. We need to spend our time with him. We need to read his words, study, and pray. We need to stay up too late and get up too early just so we can read his words and seek his presence. Movies, parties, fictional novels, and the like should take a backburner to Christ. It is not that such things are bad, but we need to seek what is better. According to the Bible, Christ comes before *anything*, whether it be family, friends, or anything else.

Can't Mormons Seek Christ?

You may ask, “does any of this have anything to do with Mormon Church?” “Certainly, Mormons are just as

capable of pursuing Christ. They can read his words and do all of the things you just mentioned, right?”

Well, that is true, but it is more difficult. Remember the analogy of the water in the desert we discussed earlier?

Let me explain further.

After I began questioning Mormonism, I began to notice, unfortunately, a great lack of Jesus in the Church. Sure, there were usually several paintings of Christ scattered throughout the building, but in the meetings themselves, in the sacrament meetings, in the Elders’ Quorum meetings, the name of Christ may have been pronounced at the end of the prayers, but he was largely absent through much of the lessons and discussions.

What do you mean?

Well, for several Sundays I took note of the topics. One entire Sunday was devoted to Joseph Smith. The speakers, including the youth speakers, all got up and taught about the wonderful works that Joseph Smith performed, how he restored the Gospel, and how he did “more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it.”¹⁹³ Hymns were sang like, “Praise to the Man,” “We Thank Thee Oh God for a Prophet,” and “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.” Sure, the talks/lessons all concluded with “I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ,” but absent that, Christ was largely void from the entire Sunday. Another Sunday the topic was temple work. The speakers all encouraged us to go to the temple, at a minimum, once a month. They emphasized the importance of performing works for our ancestors and praised that we live in a day and age

¹⁹³ D&C 135:3.

when the temple had been “restored.” There was virtually nothing about Christ, what he did, or the actual Gospel.

To be sure, if you go to another church, they *do* discuss things outside of Christ’s actual words. There are topics such as sexual immorality, addictions, and performing service that may be discussed any given Sunday. However, for a period I started visiting two churches at the same time. I would attend a sacrament meeting at the Mormon Church and then sneak down the street to a nondenominational church and hear what they had to say. The contrast was stark. The Mormon Church was so focused on its own traditions, its own modern-day prophets, and its own culture, that Christ was often left out entirely, and often for several weeks at a time.

On the other hand, in the nondenominational Christian church, even when there were discussions outside of Christ’s immediate teachings, they were almost always brought back to how to overcome those temptations, how to serve better, etc. *through Christ*. Every single sermon was based on Biblical teaching rather than supposed modern-day revelation or tradition. The songs sang at the beginning and end were virtually always about Christ. Christ was the focus, rather than just a casual mention at the close of a talk or sermon. Attending the Mormon Church, I was often reminded of Christ’s warning to the pharisees: “[n]eatly do you set aside the commandment of God, that you might keep your tradition.”¹⁹⁴

This same “tradition of the elders” continues with the scriptural cannon in the Mormon Church.¹⁹⁵ The scriptures, the actual words of God, are literally *the most effective tool* in bringing people to Christ. Indeed, “[a]ll Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

¹⁹⁴ Mark 7:9 (BLB).

¹⁹⁵ Mark 7:6.

correction, and for training in righteousness.”¹⁹⁶ Attending the Mormon Church I noticed that the words of the Bible might be mentioned once or twice during an entire month, whereas you could rarely escape a meeting without several citations to the latest general conference. I have many Mormon friends who would happily quote a scripture in the Book of Mormon, completely unaware that the quote is actually from the Bible, but twisted a little and put into the Book of Mormon. I’m guilty of this myself.

Which brings me to the primary point: If the Church’s mission is to bring people to Christ, why is he perpetually on the backburner? Why is the Bible, which contains his *actual* words, always put behind the Book of Mormon? In regard to a scripture hierarchy, I always felt (even prior to leaving the Church) as though the Bible was the largely unwanted stepchild. The Book of Mormon always came first, then the Doctrine and Covenants, then perhaps the Pearl of Great Price and the General Conference editions of the Ensign would fight for third and fourth place.

The Bible was always a distant fifth.

If you disagree with me, just simply look at your Facebook posts from your Mormon family and friends. Whenever a parent has a kid who is getting baptized, they often want to make a bold proclamation on Facebook for the world to see. And what do you see? You see a beautiful child standing there smiling, often dressed in white, and guess what he or she is holding? Of course, the Book of Mormon. I have seen dozens and dozens of these posts over the years and have yet to see a single child ever holding a copy of the Bible.

How are we supposed to know Christ if the Church is not helping us get there? Certainly, we can and should study

¹⁹⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV).

his words on our own, but why is the Church standing in the way of doing so? Why are we spending more time reading the words of “modern day prophets” studying their childhood, history, and teachings, rather than the *actual* words of the Master himself and those who *actually* lived among him? Why do we spend so much time worrying about food storage, going to the temple, and attending endless hours in bureaucratic meetings, when we could be focusing on knowing Jesus? Sure, having some extra food on hand isn’t a bad thing. Sometimes organization requires a meeting or two. However, growing up in the Church I felt as though I was on an eternal hamster wheel: running and running, but getting nowhere closer to Christ. I felt like Martha in Luke chapter 10. In this passage we read that Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary. Martha quickly ran about the house, preparing things and serving, whereas Mary just sat at the feet of the Lord and listened to his teachings. Martha, upset that she had to do all of the work, asked Jesus to tell Mary to help out. Christ replied, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, *but one thing is necessary*. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”¹⁹⁷

Indeed, as we read in John 6, Christ warned the people to not waste time on things of this world, saying, “[d]on’t work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” When the people asked what works they were perform for God, Jesus replied, “[t]his is the work of God—that you believe in the one that he has sent.”

Did you catch that?

What is the primary work that we are supposed to do? *To believe in Christ!* To be sure, as stated earlier, believing is

¹⁹⁷ Luke 10:41-42 (ESV).

more than simply proclaiming that Jesus is Christ and carrying on with your normal lives. Our focus needs to change to Christ and his words, and our actions need to reflect that. We need to do the works that God has set before us to do. If we focus on Christ, he will change us. He will make us into the people that we are supposed to be and enable us to do the works that God foreordained for us to do. Unfortunately, I fear that the Mormon Church will not get you there, but will distract you from Christ, placing a much higher priority on its own traditions and customs.

Again, only one thing is necessary, and that is Christ our Lord.

Why Christ?

This, really, is the ultimate question. *Why Christ?*

What is my motivation for seeking him out?

As a defense lawyer, a significant part of my job consists of discrediting and destroying. The burden is always on the plaintiff to establish his or her case, and a significant portion of my job is spent poking holes in their stories and discrediting their witnesses. Often, I don't even need to present another version of events if I can poke enough holes in the narrative of the other side. Unfortunately, this is the result from much of the "anti-Mormon" information out there. Although I believe their intentions are often sincere, the authors simply point out the flaws in Mormon theology and then leave the reader with no replacement, no hope, and nothing else to go on. Worse yet, some of these authors who have virtually no scientific background, will regurgitate things heard from other largely uneducated people and push anti-God and atheistic ideas on people. They will present a very one-sided story, and only discourage the truth seeker. My fear with

this book is doing just that. I do not want to poke a bunch of holes in your faith and walk off.

There is too much at stake.

I started this book by speaking of the gaping hole, the God-shaped hole, I have felt in my life. I believe the book needs to end with this focus.

As a child I was always good with money. We would have yard sales, and I would sell old toys, video games, and other random items and always walk away with more money than any of my siblings who might try to do the same thing. Even at 12 years old, I had a consistent job mowing lawns and always had money in the bank. I always wanted to have more, even at a young age. Growing older and entering into the college age, that same mindset continued. I remember thinking that people who spent money on expensive vacations were foolish. That vacation would last a week, but the big-screen television I bought would last me a decade. I valued possessions over experiences and eternal possessions were really nowhere in sight.

However, one night that started to change.

I will never forget it, nor can I explain it. I recall vividly sitting in a Pier 49 Pizza in American Fork, Utah. It was a weekend and I was alone. I suppose I was probably going to catch a movie at the theater next door and was grabbing dinner beforehand, but I really can't remember those details. But I do remember sitting there in the restaurant and just starting to contemplate life. I began to think how volatile life was. One minute you're on top of the world, you're a CEO with lots of money and a beautiful wife, and the next minute your dead on the interstate in a terrible accident. No, I wasn't a CEO, but I was a bachelor with a decent job, a condo, and a motorcycle. I thought about how I had spent most of my life up to that point.

Sure, I was young and had some nice things, but would that matter if I died? What mattered in the long run? Assuming that there was a life after death, would I ever be grateful that I owned more stuff than the guy next door? Probably not.

No, definitely not.

I recognized at that moment that was Christ said was true: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal... store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”¹⁹⁸ I realized at that moment that my priorities had been pretty mixed up. If I died, I would not care about what things I owned; no, I would only care about what I did and whose lives I had touched for the better.

I can’t say it was a huge revelation that changed my life at that very moment. Unfortunately, I didn’t go back to my condo and sell my stuff and begin life anew. However, that memory has stuck in my mind for somewhere around 15 years now, and even haunts me now as I write this book. I hope and pray that this book touches your life for the better. I hope and pray that this book helps in your journey to Christ. I hope this book helps you realize what is *really* important.

So back to the ultimate question: why Christ?

I hope, like me sitting in Pier 49 Pizza, you have realized something is missing from your life. Like the Samaritan woman sitting at the well, you have realized that earthly relationship after earthly relationship will always leave you wanting. Like her, perhaps, you’ve realized that love and attention from another human being is not the ultimate

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV).

intimacy you were destined for; there is someone who knows you more completely and loves you more fully, faults and all, than you could ever imagine. I hope you have realized that literally nothing that this world has to offer is ever going to satisfy you.

Take a moment now and reflect on this.

Seriously. Stop here and reflect on this.

You have probably spent most of your life trying to get more or experience more: that cruise, that big house in the suburbs, or that amazing home theater. You realize how temporary everything just listed is, right? Have you noticed God moving in your life? Have you felt an emptiness that such things have to offer? Again, I'm not saying that all such things are bad; but they shouldn't be your goal. If you have a beautiful house in the suburbs, that's fine, thank God for it; however, your heart shouldn't be there. The plumbing will leak. The electrical will fizzle out. The shingles will fly off with the next big storm. If your heart is in the stuff you own, you will be eternally unhappy. The words of CS Lewis, unfortunately, have applied all too well to my own experience and life:

“If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant

by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”¹⁹⁹

Infinite joy.

When we ask, “why Christ?” infinite joy is the answer.

Christ is offering us so much more than *anything* this world has to offer. He is offering to fill the gaping hole in your heart, with joy that will never end and will never die. This is why Paul exclaimed that he counted “all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”²⁰⁰ According to Paul, the gains and losses of this world are but dung, or in more current English, crap. We are but children, playing in the mud, *playing in the crap*, failing to recognize the joy that lies before us in Christ.

I believe the infinite joy begins in this life by realizing that Christ has accomplished his mission. Although we are yet sinners, he has overcome sin and defeated death for us. There is infinite peace and joy in knowing that the job is done. This is what sets Christianity apart from all other faiths. We do not have to wonder every Sunday whether we have gone too far or screwed up too badly. We do not have to perform another sacrifice for the sins we did last week. We can rest in knowing that Jesus Christ has already won the war and that we are indeed saved. Does this make sense? Can you feel the infinite joy that comes with this knowledge? If you were diagnosed with cancer, but I already knew with a 100% certainty that you would make a complete recovery, don’t you think the treatments and burdens of that terrible disease would be

¹⁹⁹ C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 1949/2001), 26.

²⁰⁰ Philippians 3:8 (KJV).

greatly in lightened by the knowledge that it will end with your complete health?

Although we are all spiritually sick, Christ has already perfected the cure!

After you truly come to Christ and recognize your salvation in and through Christ, he truly begins to replace your desires of this world for the desires *after* this world. In “churchy” terms, you begin to be “sanctified.” Truly, after coming to Christ, he’ll give you his Spirit and begin to “remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”²⁰¹ After you come to Christ, those commandments which you may have reluctantly semi-obeyed in the past, become something you *want* to follow. No longer is it a burden to keep the commandments or serve your neighbors; through Christ, this becomes your desire. Through Christ that gaping hole that you have felt in your soul gets filled.

I can state from personal experience that it doesn’t always come fast. I am sure there are those whose lives make a radical 180-degree turn, they change immediately, and they never look back. But for me personally, it has been a gradual, but noticeable change. I struggled for a long time with immoral and lustful thoughts and actions. This was struggle for me throughout my active years as a Mormon. However, after coming to Christ he has gradually removed the taste from my mouth. He has filled my life with more important things that overshadow any satisfaction I received in the past by succumbing the flesh. I have found myself significantly more open with others. Although selfishness has been a part of my character since I was a kid, I have found myself giving more, sharing more, and expecting less in return. For the first time in my life I crave the word of God. Reading the scriptures was a

²⁰¹ Ezekiel 36:26.

daily chore before; now I *want* to study God's word. My day is not the same without putting God first.

These are just a few examples, and I know everyone's journey is different; but this much I can tell you: by coming to Christ we begin to be who we are meant to be; not who this world expects us to be, not even who we *think* we want to be, but who we are meant to be and what we were created for. In the words of CS Lewis, "the more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become – because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be... It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."

That is really it.

Through Christ we are saved. Through Christ we are changed. Through Christ we produce fruit. Through Christ we are made whole and become complete. Through Christ we discover what we were made for. *That* is "why Christ."

So, What's Next?

Come to Christ.

No, this doesn't mean you have to first clean up your act, wear a white shirt and tie or climb to the top of a mountain. Here, and now, confess that Jesus is your Lord and Savior and that you will dedicate your life to him, *and mean it*. Hold nothing back. Be willing to give anything and everything, including any favorite sin or worldly pleasure that you have still been holding onto. Admit that you have tried to satisfy your soul with the empty things of this world, and you realize that it was all worthless. Admit you want Christ to fill your life and then submit yourself to him. Trust the word of God when it promised that "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is

Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Then let him guide you.

It does not matter if you are one of those people who has spent his entire life going through the religious motions and feels stuck in a rut; Christ still there for you. Even if you are a sinner who has wasted much of his life pursuing the flesh and know very little about Christ; he is still knocking at the door. There is no one too far gone, and no time is too late; but there is no time like the present. As Paul stated, "[b]ut I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life."²⁰²

If you are not there yet, not ready to give your life over to Christ, then please, do not stop here. Study the Bible. Pray sincerely and deeply. Read the books in this Appendix. Search the evidence and I am confident that you will come to the same conclusion I have. You will find *the Way*, and he will find you.

Come to Christ and let everything else fall in place.

²⁰² 1 Timothy 1:16 (CSB).

Chapter 12: Now what? Practical Advice

I pray you have felt something changing in your life. I hope you feel moved to Christ. So now the question is: where do you start? Maybe you have been transitioning out of the Church for a while and have already found a new Christian community. If not, that's really a good place to start. It is going to be extremely difficult if you do not have others to share this journey with, others to lift you up and that you can lift up. I would highly recommend you find a good non-denominational Christian church and see what they have to offer. If there isn't a non-denominational church in your area, then just find a good Protestant Christian church. Visit a few times and see if they are preaching the word of God. If not, then find another.

I will never forget when I started at the church I currently attend. I had been attending for a couple of months when the youth pastor approach me and invited our family to join in their small group. This was new to me, but I welcomed the invitation and accepted. At the very first evening we met for the small group, there were probably around 12 or 14 people in total, and we were all having a very spiritual and open discussion about the lessons from the sermon earlier that day. The leader of the group stood up and said, "now it's time for gender breakout." The men went into another room and the women stayed where we were. Of course, I immediately thought of Elder's Quorum/Priesthood meeting. But it was so much better, shocking even.

After we all sat down and had some icebreaking chat for a little bit, the leader then asked everyone, "what sins are you guys struggling with?" He opened up the discussion for each one of us to confess our sins to one another. I was shocked and a little scared. However, this was a judgment-free zone where we could all be open and honest with each other. No

one held back. Every guy admitted some struggle, some sin, some addiction, or something else that was really a burden in his life. After each person would make his confession, we would stop and pray for him. We all confessed and we all prayed for each other. It was a fulfilment of the direct command in James 5:16, which states that you are to “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” It was so unlike anything I had ever seen in Mormonism. I did not have to confess to an authoritarian bishop who might punish me for my transgressions. No, we were to confess to one another so that we could “be healed.”

Finding a community has made the transition much, much easier. I highly recommend you find yourself a good church community and start attending right away. Not only will this help you in your spiritual journey, it will help you in your social life and your community as a whole. You cannot do this alone.

Next, get yourself a good Bible. The King James is, frankly, not the best for the modern reader. We do not speak English from the 1600s. I, personally, get frustrated if I call technical support and get someone outside the US with a really thick accent who is difficult to understand. I prefer US/English-based technical support, so I fully understand the directions I’m getting and there is no barrier to communication. Why wouldn’t I want the same with the word of God?

Forsooth, upon the procurement of the word of the LORD in my native tongue, the darkness dispersed and sun doth shine with greater luminosity. Nobody talks this way today. And if they do, they are weird or at a renaissance fair. What is the value in trying to read it this way? Once I purchased a modern English Bible, passages that used to make virtually no sense at all were clear as day.

I would highly recommend a good modern English *Study Bible*. There are many good options out there, but I highly recommend the English Standard Version or the Christian Standard Bible, or both. These are both very accurate and clear translations and the study portions/commentary on both bibles is extraordinarily helpful.

Read the Bible.

Seriously, read it. Study it. Feast on it. I know you think you've read it before, but put away any and all preconceived notions of what you think things mean and start over. Read the Bible with a fresh set of eyes, disregarding what you have learned growing up. Start with the New Testament. You will see the Bible like you have never seen it before. Passages will make more sense and God will open His word up to you. Which brings me to the next thing.

Pray.

Pray day and night, like you have never prayed before. Pray that God opens His word in your heart and manifests Himself to you. Pray for the Holy Spirit to be in your life. Pray for healing. Pray just to express gratitude to God. Pray that He fills the hole in your soul and makes you complete. Pray to know Him and be known by Him. Pray at church with your new friends. Don't worry that you still say "thee" and "thy" in your prayers (it took me a while to get over that), just pray. Open up your heart to God and He will hear you.

Finally, trust in God.

There are times in your life where you will feel God close, and there are times when He will not feel as close. You may have heard of the term an "Ebenezer stone." It is a weird term and it has nothing to do with "A Christmas Carol." It has to do with putting a boundary, putting a reminder in your life

of how far God has brought you, so you don't fall back. In 1 Samuel 7:12, Samuel set up an Ebenezer stone to remind the people how far God had helped them. Set up mental stones in your life so that you can recall what God has done for you. There have been times in my life where I am tempted or confronted with attacks on my faith. In those moments I can look back at the times in my life where I have no doubt God was there. I can remember the miracles, the voice in my heart, the whisper from God. Follow the heed of CS Lewis to maintain your faith, in spite of your changing moods. If it has been a while since you have felt God in your life, get on your knees and pray. A good friend of mine once told me something I hope I never forget: "If you aren't feeling God close in your life, who moved?" Indeed, it is not usually God who has moved away.

Closing

I hope this has helped. I truly do. If I have offended anyone in anything, I sincerely apologize. My intent in writing this book is to help your soul be filled, to help you come to Christ, to help you be a new creation in him. If even one person comes to Christ with the assistance of this book, then I am happy. I truly felt he wanted me to write this book and I hope it accomplishes its purpose.

I am praying for you.

APPENDIX

For additional readings, if you are looking for evidences for Christ and the truth of the Christian faith, here are a few of my recommendations.

- *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, Crossway Books, 2004. (This may be the best book I have read for the evidence for the existence of God, for Jesus, and for the accuracy of the Bible).
- *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World*, by Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, Thomas Nelson Publisher, (October 3, 2017).
- *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, Joseph M Holden and Norman Geisler, Harvest House Publishers, 2013.

Any of these books will send you into a whirlwind of references and resources, and probably spending too much money on Christianbook.com as it did me.

For less scholarly/technical but powerful and more readable books, **I highly recommend:**

- *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels*, J. Warner Wallace, Publisher David C. Cook, 2013.
- *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, Lee Strobel, Zondervan, 1998.

For a better understanding of how we ended up with the 66 books of the Bible, and why such can be trusted as reliable, I highly recommend:

- The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible, Joseph M Holden and Norman Geisler, Harvest House Publishers, 2013.
- How We Got the Bible, Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, Rose Publishing, 2015.
- God-Breathed: The Undeniable Power and Reliability of Scripture, Josh McDowell, Barbour Books, 2015.