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PRESENTS

**The Eternity and Immutability of God**

*A Theological Treatise of The Mormon god-man*

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## **The Mormon Concept Of Eternal/Everlasting**

The Mormon concept of eternal is critical in understanding the many heresies in their doctrines of God. When speaking of or defending their own concept of God, Mormons tend to agree that eternal is an accurate description of God in one dimension of time - the future. That is, LDS agree that God is somehow in a never-ending state of godhood.<sup>1</sup> Joseph Smith himself declared that God cannot still be progressing. He stated, "it is equally as necessary that men should have the idea that he is a God who changes not..."<sup>2</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, a Mormon "apostle," stated as one of his definitions of eternal: "that which is of infinite duration, which goes on forever and has no end is eternal, endless, everlasting."<sup>3</sup>

But what about the past? Was God always the same in Mormonism? As it will be shown, Mormons cannot say that he was. Here, the LDS view of how God is everlasting is best captured by Joseph Fielding Smith, a prophet of the Mormon church:

From eternity to eternity means from the spirit existence through the probation which we are in, and then back again to the eternal existence which will follow. Surely this is everlasting, for when we receive the resurrection, we will never die. We all existed in the first eternity. I think I can say of myself and others, we are from eternity; and we will be to eternity everlasting, if we receive the exaltation. The intelligent part of man was never created but always existed. That is true of each of us as well as it is of God, yet we are born sons and daughters of God in the spirit and are destined to exist forever. Those who become like God will also be from eternity to eternity.<sup>4</sup>

So, it is clear then from Joseph Fielding Smith, that the LDS do not teach about a God who is infinitely eternal from before creation and time. God existed as God in the pre-existence, but not truly eternally from everlasting to everlasting. Furthermore, Mormons deny a creation ex-nihilo, while instead, they believe that our intelligence and souls were not created and that furthermore, God did not have the power to create our intelligence.

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<sup>1</sup> The reader is reminded that LDS use the term "eternal" differently with God than with scriptures. Mormons believe God was not always God and eternal only applies in this sense in terms of God's future, i.e. never ending. In terms of the scriptures, the Mormons cannot believe that the word of God is everlasting, as there have been enormous changes in their own scriptures (See footnote 13). All meanings of the word eternal are lost in this case. Their scriptures were not the same yesterday, today or tomorrow for any of the Mormon prophets.

<sup>2</sup> *Lectures On Faith* (p. 42).

<sup>3</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1979), p. 233.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith (compiled by Bruce R. McConkie), *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1954), vol. 1, p. 12.

There is one last sense in which the LDS use the word eternity, which is worth mentioning. Bruce R. McConkie summarizes this form of the word best: “One of the names of God is Eternal... This name of Deity signifies that he is ‘infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting.’”<sup>5</sup> Here, Eternal is merely a noun and not an adjective.

Using Eternal as a proper noun would be perfectly acceptable if this form of “eternal” did not have such great significance to the Mormon doctrine of a hell which is not truly everlasting.<sup>6</sup> In this case, the Mormon use of the word, “eternal,” completely contradicts all of scripture’s statements concerning hell. Moreover, if God’s names all truly tell us something about his nature, what does this title tell us about God if he is not eternal from eternity to eternity?

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<sup>5</sup> McConkie, p. 233.

<sup>6</sup> When speaking of eternal punishment, Mormons abuse the use of the word eternal and claim that it is merely a noun, a name of God, used to mean the same as “God’s punishment.” Hence, “eternal punishment” really is “Eternal punishment,” meaning “God’s punishment,” instead of a hell which never ends for the unbeliever at death.

## **The Biblical Concept and Meaning of Eternal/Everlasting**

As with any doctrine concerning God, his gospel, his creation, or his kingdom, an approach must begin with the Word of God. The good Lord has blessed man with 66 inspired and perfect works, all of which stand together as the chapters of one book, one message, one gospel - The Holy Bible. So, what does the Bible reveal to man about the eternity and immutability of God?

The Bible is clear that God has always been God and that God will always be God. The Psalmist repeatedly praises God as the one with whom there is no change. He says:

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. (Ps. 102:25-27)

Here we find a God who is sharply contrasted with his creation. Even from before the creation of the world, he was and is the same. Therefore, God is not aging or getting old, as he exists outside or independently of time<sup>7</sup>. The psalmist says again, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen" (Ps. 41:13). And again, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2). The Hebrew word here, '*olam*', is used for "from everlasting" and also for "to everlasting." It indicates an infinite past just the same as an infinite future. He will endure the same in the endless future as he has in the endless past. God has always and will always be the same.

The prophet Malachi understood this when he wrote of God, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (3:6). The immutability of God is what gave the sons of Jacob hope in not being consumed. If God was capable of changing or had ever changed in the past, his promises would not be worth trusting. This is the same reason for our

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<sup>7</sup> It is easily proven that God exists outside of time if he does not change, since change requires position or place in time, as any student of the calculus would attest. There is no amount of time that one could wait to induce or see God change! Therefore, God is not subject to time (he exists outside of time).

own hope in his promises to us. The author of Hebrews affirms that God cannot possibly lie (Heb. 6:18). It is impossible for God to lie because he has never changed and will never change. Furthermore, the Apostle James expands on God's immutable character by stating that in God, there "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (1:17). In this context, James is reassuring God's people that good gifts will continue to come from God, since he has always granted us good gifts and does not change. All things work for the good of those whom he loves. What an assurance we have in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel, and the God of the Bible, even Jesus Christ! He is our hope, as he was, is and will always be the same.

This eternity of God stretches far into a realm of nontime that we can not understand. Time did not exist before God created the world and the heavens and all that in them are. For God, the years can not even be called years, as his infinite time dwarfs our own petty measurements of what we call time. Elihu states, "the number of his years is unsearchable" (Job 36:26). His years are unsearchable, because God exists outside of time. This can be understood as nothing less than the fact that God was always and will always be God. The Holy Word continues to make known the worth of a day in God's eyes: "For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night" (Ps. 90:4). How much worth is a period of time (a watch) in the night? It is useless, and so is time when talking about the existence of God. Furthermore, a day and a thousand years are equated to drive that same point home. So that there is no ambiguity here, Peter quoted this verse in the New Testament, but added that "one day is as a thousand years" (Pet. 3:8). Peter is using what is known at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and higher levels of math as the Law of Equality:

If  $a = b$ , then  $b = a$ .

If it were revealed that  $7=1$  and  $1=7$ , our whole math system would have no meaning. Just the same, in terms of God's own being, time has no meaning as a day to him is the same as a thousand years and one thousand years is the same as a day. His existence is a state of an ever-presence, wherein he exists completely independently of time.

Perhaps the single greatest revelation of God's relation to time and his immutability, is the name he used to reveal himself to the people of Israel. In Ex. 3:4, God told Moses that Israel is to know him as "I AM." All that we learn of God's immutability and eternity is simply an extension of this name. God just is! But why the present tense here? Gerald Bray seizes on a good point:

Perhaps the key to the problem of eternity can be found by examining the concept of the 'present'. Most of us believe that time can be divided into three segments - the past, the present and the future. Yet when we look at them more closely, we discover that in fact time consists only of the past and the future: the present does not really exist. This is because no matter how carefully we pinpoint the moment in time which we call 'now', as soon as we have uttered the word, that moment has become past.<sup>8</sup>

And, until we utter the word, it remains part of the future. Therefore, Bray concludes that the present really "does not belong to the sphere of time at all."<sup>9</sup> What a perfect way then for God to teach us about his own essence and relation to time. The present becomes a window to eternity and it becomes clear how God could act in time, yet exist totally outside of time. What a perfect verb tense and name the Lord has chosen to use as his identity among Israel.

The importance of this is even further appreciated when reading the Apostle John's Gospel. When Jesus was asked by the Jews "whom makest thou thyself?" and "how hast thou seen Abraham?" his answer was quite simply "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Jesus was claiming to be God here and was almost stoned by his less than friendly inquisitors for making such a claim. Jesus Christ, God Almighty, was without beginning. The present tense is so bold here as it appears in the middle of a sentence structured around the past tense. Before you or I were created, Jesus Is! This is either an English (or Greek) teacher's nightmare, or a beautiful exposition of God's relation to time. In fact, the Greek "ego eimi" (I am) is repeatedly accredited to Jesus throughout the gospel of John<sup>10</sup>. Each of these "I am" claims refers to the eternity and full deity of Christ. Either Christ is God Almighty, from everlasting to

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<sup>8</sup> Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology: The Doctrine of God* (Downer's Grove, IL, 1993) p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Bray, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, I am The Bread, The Light, The Door, The Good Shepherd, The Resurrection and The Life, The Vine, and King.

everlasting, or he is the most egocentric person to live. Jesus Is! Let the doctrine of God's eternity be concluded by the words written by John in the Book of Revelations: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Rev. 1:4, See also 4:8, 11:17, and 16:5).

Notice that in all of the above verses, there were no qualifiers in the Greek, Hebrew or English translations to limit any of the applications. It is impossible to use written or verbal communication to make the doctrine of God's immutability and eternity any clearer than this. Observe that on the contrary, it would be so easy to limit the wording by saying "I used to change, but I promise I will never change again." Or better yet, if God were not immutable, then why even mention yesterday or the past? But, those who recorded God's Word for us never limited their teachings in this way!

So, how can the biblical teaching on the eternity and immutability of God be summarized? First by eternity it is meant that "God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time."<sup>11</sup> Second, that "God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 168.

<sup>12</sup> Grudem, p. 163.

## **Doctrinal Heresies Permitted In Mormonism**

Ignoring the Word of God goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). The first words out of Satan's mouth are, "Hath God Said?" or perhaps as the NIV has it, "Did God really say?" The implications of belittling God's Word are rather great. The whole human race fell through one man's disobedience (Rom 5). What happens when one ignores the biblical teaching about God's immutability and eternity and follows after the teaching of the Mormon authorities?

### **The Arianistic Jesus**

Centuries ago, the early Church defeated and condemned the heretical teachings of Arius, who affirmed that Christ was less than God and that he had a beginning (was created). Despite the fact that the teachings of Arius were officially rejected by the Church in the Fourth century, Arianism is still ever-present today. Mormonism, along with the Jehovah Witnesses, excels as a school which affirms a lesser god, a created Jesus.

Mormonism even teaches a lesser Jesus than one who simply once was not. They teach that Jesus and Satan (Lucifer) and all of mankind are actually the literal sons and daughters of a polygamist father god and his many wives. Therefore, all of mankind, whether in Christ through faith or not, are brothers and sisters of Christ and are literally sons of God.<sup>13</sup> Teaching that Lucifer is the literal elder brother of Jesus Christ<sup>14</sup>, who is distinguished only by his selfish desire

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<sup>13</sup> The Bible is clear, though, that we were created by God, not spiritually procreated, and that we become sons of God only by adoption (Rom. 8:15). Those who are led by the spirit are the sons of God (Rom 8:14). See also Rom 8:23, 9:4; and Gal. 3:22-29 (esp. 3:26).

<sup>14</sup> See Moses 4:1-4. Brigham Young taught the following about Christ and Lucifer, while attacking Christians who put their faith in Christ and turn life's situations over to a sovereign and omnipotent God who is able to take upon himself our burdens and troubles: "When men say: 'O Lord, we are the clay, you are the potter! Fashion, shape and make us, and do with us as seems good in Thy sight, only let us know Thy will, we are here to perform whatever Thou requirest,' it makes me think of that second person that came forth in the heavens when the voice went forth: 'Who will redeem the earth, who will go forth and make the sacrifice for the earth and all things it contains?' The eldest son said: 'Here am I;' but he did not say 'send me.' But the second one, which was 'Lucifer, son of the morning,' said, 'Lord, here am I, send me, I will redeem every son and daughter of Adam and Eve that lives on the earth, or that ever goes on the earth.' 'But,' says the Father, 'that will not answer at all. I give each and every individual his agency; all must use that in order to gain exaltation in my kingdom; inasmuch as they have the power of choice they must exercise that power. They are my children; the attributes which you see in me are in my children and they must use their agency. If you undertake to save all, you must save them in unrighteousness and

to be equal to God, totally degrades the exalted eternally pre-existent essence and nature of the Son, Jesus Christ - God Almighty.

### **God The Father: An exalted man**

Yet, in Mormonism, the heresies do not end with Jesus Christ. In fact, they do not even start with Christ. Whereas Arians challenge the full divinity of Jesus Christ, the Mormons contest the eternality of the Father also. The Mormons teach that God the Father was once a man!

So, who is this Mormon man become god?<sup>15</sup> A good source as any to fairly represent the LDS teaching would be Joseph Smith, as this is where the Mormon god-man doctrine originated. Shortly before his own death, Smith preached a sermon during a funeral for a Mormon named King Follet. To 20,000 people, he preached the following words:

I speak as one having authority.... I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth, for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and to tell you the designs of God in relation to the human race, and why He interferes with the affairs of man.

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret.... it is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how he came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see.... he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible.

Here, then, is eternal life -- to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you,...

...My Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take his place, and thereby become exalted myself.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Smith's teachings can be summarized by the following:

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corruption. You will be the man that will say to the thief on the cross, to the murderer on the gallows, and to him who had killed his father, mother, brothers, and sisters and little ones, 'Now, if you will say, I repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, or on the Savior of the world, you shall be saved.' This is what all the religious sects of the day are saying now, but Jesus did not say any such thing." Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* vol 13, p. 280.

<sup>15</sup> Before beginning, it must be noted that the quoted teachings are still taught today by the LDS church and are extracted from multiple sources of the finest and highest LDS authorities. The Mormon must be aware that it is an inescapable teaching under current Mormon theology and is unavoidable for every Mormon. Furthermore, this raises a question for many, that when the Mormons proselytize, why is there not a single mention of any of these teachings on the nature of the Father? Why does Mormonism hide behind orthodox terminology when teaching "new investigators," but then teach behind this public relations masquerade a much more infringing and offensive doctrine? This is nothing less than deception and trickery.

<sup>16</sup> *Teachings of The Prophet Joseph Smith* p. 345-348.

1. it is necessary that we understand the character and being of God; and,
2. God has not been the same from all eternity (by stating this, it implies that Smith very clearly understood the meaning of eternity as it is used correctly here in his sentence, although he is denying God's unchanging nature); and,
3. God the Father was once a man just like we are; and,
4. God progressed and worked out his own kingdom; and,
5. we have all got to learn to become gods.

This teaching has always been affirmed by the LDS church. Mormon Apostle, Orson Hyde taught the same doctrine in October of 1853:

Remember that God, our heavenly Father, was perhaps once a child, and mortal like we ourselves, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement; has moved forward and overcome, until He has arrived at the point where He now is. "Is this really possible?" Why, my dear friends, how would you like to be governed by a ruler who had not been through all the vicissitudes of life that are common to mortals? If he had not suffered, how could he sympathise with the distress of others? If he himself had not endured the same, how could he sympathise and be touched with the feelings of our infirmities? He could not, unless he himself had passed through the same ordeal, and overcome step by step.<sup>17</sup>

Each point taught by Smith is reaffirmed by another Mormon authority, Hyde. Notice that Hyde emphasizes that if the Father were not a man at one time, then God would not have shared in our "vicissitudes" of life. Brigham Young, second prophet of the Mormon church clearly taught the same, as he stated the following in October of 1859:

"...you can find out something about God, and begin to learn who he is. He is our Father--the Father of our spirits, and was once a man in mortal flesh as we are, and is now an exalted Being. How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through. That course has been from all eternity, and it is and will be to all eternity. You cannot comprehend this; but when you can, it will be to you a matter of great consolation. It appears ridiculous to the world, under their darkened and erroneous traditions, that God has once been a finite being; and yet we are not in such close communion with him as many have supposed. He has passed on, and is exalted far beyond what we can now comprehend. Eye hath not seen [sic], ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive all the things of God. We are not capacitated to receive them all at once; but God, by his Spirit, reveals to our spirits as we grow and become able and capacitated to comprehend, through improving upon every means of grace placed within our power, until we shall be counted worthy to receive all things."<sup>18</sup>

Young here clearly is in accord with Smith. Furthermore, Young, like Smith, uses eternity correctly here as he equates it to "there never was a time when there were not ..." Thus, the

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<sup>17</sup> Orson Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:123.

<sup>18</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, p. 333

LDS have a clear affirmation of what the word “eternity” means, although Smith and Young are both denying the unchanging nature of God at the same time.

Perhaps the most noted and quoted summary of the Mormon doctrine of an exalted man-god is a statement made by the Mormon prophet, Lorenzo Snow:

As man now is, God once was;  
As God now is, man may be.<sup>19</sup>

Naturally, if God was once a man, then it would only follow that man's goal here on earth would be to become gods. So, Snow concludes the sum of the Mormon doctrine of god and the “practical” application to man, that man can become deified, just like God himself was.

In addition to teaching this doctrine, many Mormons insist that this doctrine is not only biblical, but that it was also taught by the early Church fathers. Stephen Robinson in his Mormon apology, *Are Mormons Christians?*, defends this heretical teaching about the nature of God the Father by claiming that the most “orthodox” of the Christian fathers preached the very same doctrine. He writes:

In the second century Saint Irenaeus, the most important Christian theologian of his time, said much of the same thing as Lorenzo Snow:  
If the Word became a man,  
It was so men may become gods.<sup>20</sup>

Does Robinson have a good point here? He supports this statement with several other statements of the early Church fathers. One of the most seemingly convincing is:

In the early fourth century Saint Athanasius - that tireless foe of heresy after whom the orthodox Athanasian Creed is named - also stated his belief in deification in terms very similar to those of Lorenzo Snow: “The Word was made flesh in order that we might be enabled to be made gods ... Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a man, so also we men are both deified through his flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life.”<sup>21</sup>

Has Christendom really gone astray today and abandoned the teachings of the early Church fathers? If so, does this not warrant consideration of the Mormon doctrine of their god? Can we

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<sup>19</sup> Lorenzo Snow (Clyde J. Williams, ed.), *Teachings of The Prophet Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1984) p. 1. This couplet of words are also reported in the *Deseret Weekly* 49 (3 Nov. 1894), p. 610; *Deseret Weekly* 57 (8 Oct. 1898), p. 513; *Deseret News* 52 (15 June 1901), p. 177; and *Journal History of the Church*, 20 July 1901, p. 4, according to Stephen Robinson in his book *Are Mormons Christians?*

<sup>20</sup> Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1991), p. 60

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, p. 61.

literally become gods just like our Father in Heaven? If not, what do these teachings by the early Church fathers mean?

## An Orthodox Response

### **The Arian Heresy - A Question of Christ's Deity**

A major point of difference between biblical orthodoxy and Mormonism is the identity of Jesus Christ - the question of Christ's full and absolute deity. That Jesus has always existed as God Almighty is one of the clearest teachings of the Bible. Yet, the Mormons insist on a Jesus who was not fully God. Consequently the LDS diminish the meaning of the atonement and question whether or not we can truly honor Jesus as God.

### The Atonement of Christ

So, what does the Bible say about Jesus Christ? The basic fundamental message of the Bible is that God himself saves his people. The fact that God does the saving apart from the work of anyone else is the critical issue and that which most convincingly proves the divinity of Christ. The Old Testament constantly proclaims that God will save his people. So Christ's fulfillment of the words of Isaiah as Messiah Immanuel (literally, "God with us," Isa. 7:14), absolutely confirms that Christ is God Almighty (Isa. 9:6) from everlasting to everlasting. The title of the One God of Israel and all the earth is specifically "The Mighty God" throughout the entire Old Testament (Gen. 49:24-25, Ps. 50:1, Jer. 32:18 and Hab. 1:12). Jesus' title, "The Mighty God," can only mean that Christ is fully God.

Furthermore, the Bible is very clear that the God of Israel is God alone! Isaiah declares:

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that **I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.**

I, even I, am the LORD; and **beside me there is no saviour.**

I have declared, **and have saved**, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that **I am God.**

**Yea, before the day was I am he;** and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it? (Isa 43:10-13)

Jesus Christ, being fully God, was always and will always be God. There were no gods before him, nor will there be any after him. Of God, Isaiah also declares "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (44:6). Hence, we can refer to Christ as the Alpha and

Omega (Rev. 1:8, 1:11, 21:6, 22:13). He alone, God from all eternity - everlasting to everlasting, can we trust for our salvation. He is God and Savior. The words of Isaiah leave no room for confusion about who does the saving.

Faith in a savior who is anything less than Eternal God Almighty will save no one from the everlasting punishment that awaits sinful man. It was well understood by the Jews of the time that only God could save his people from their sins (Luke 5:21, 7:37,49). Besides it being a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament affirms this fact. For when we sin, it is God alone against whom we sin (Ps. 51:4). Obviously then, only God would be able to forgive our sins. It is a Holy God who has called his children unto repentance and faith in himself. And for this reason, the atonement of Christ (God himself), we have a hope in our salvation. For God and God alone has sufficiently saved us!

Again, the LDS teaching of a creature savior is a denial of the Infinite Atonement truly offered by Christ. It belittles Christ's blood to that of a mere animal's (a creature's), which when shed under the Law could only atone for the sin at hand and had to be offered repeatedly<sup>22</sup>. Consequently, the Mormons have taught that there are sins apart from blaspheming the Holy Spirit and unbelief, which can not be atoned for by the blood of Christ<sup>23</sup>. The LDS cannot change this belittling view of Christ's atonement, due to their past practices of blood atonement<sup>24</sup>. (Blood atonement was a Mormon practice, where the blood of Mormons was

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, all the acts of atonement of the Old Testament Law were dependent upon the eventual eternal sacrifice of Christ! Yet, each sacrifice was a type of The Eternal Sacrifice of Christ that was offered once and for all (The entire book of Hebrews, especially 10:10).

<sup>23</sup> McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 737. Under "Sin Unto Death," McConkie lists murder, and some classes of adultery as sins which were not atoned for by Christ. D&C 64:7 is very clear that there are sins (plural) that God's people can commit which lead to death.

<sup>24</sup> There are several testimonies by Mormons of Brigham Young's days, including William Smith, who admit that Brigham Young had a group of "Danites" who would carry out death sentences for people guilty of these sins. Although the Mormons reject that this ever happened, for actual testimonies the reader is referred to Thelma Geer's *Mormonism, Mama and Me* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986) and Sandra and Jerald Tanner's *Confessions of John D. Lee* (Salt Lake City, UT: date unknown), a photomechanical reprint of the 1877 book, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or The Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee*. Mormons went to trial in the U.S. Supreme Court on what is known now as the "Mountain Meadows Massacre," an act which was a part of the LDS blood atonements.

required for murder, adultery, apostasy, stealing and even marriage to a negro)<sup>25</sup>. Most of today's Mormons deny that these death sentences were ever carried out, despite the clear teachings of both Brigham Young and Joseph Smith. Young and Smith both taught that Christ's blood was not offered as a sacrifice once and for all (despite Heb. 10:10).

The LDS not only teach this to their church members, but they also try to prove that "Christians" don't believe in the finality of the atonement either. They claim that the death penalty today is a perfect example of "blood atonement." Joseph Fielding Smith wrote that "certain sins ... will place the transgressors beyond the power of the atonement of Christ ... the blood of Christ will not cleanse them from their sins **even though they repent**. Therefore, their only hope is to have their blood shed [death penalty] to atone, as far as possible, in their behalf ..." <sup>26</sup> One would have to ask what the blood of Christ is worth if anyone on death row will be saved from hell by their own blood apart from repentance and faith in Christ! This begs the question, "How much is our own blood worth before God?" (The biblical answer is nothing, since a sacrifice without blemish was required!). Or, if sins such as stealing or adultery cannot be forgiven through honest faith and repentance (without the shedding of blood), is this not a second case, where Christ's blood has accomplished absolutely nothing? It is no wonder that Joseph Smith (in defiance of the whole book of Hebrews, especially 10:10) once taught that

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<sup>25</sup> Any Christian who believes in the atonement of Jesus Christ would find the following statements by Brigham Young outrageous and offensive and reject his teachings and pretended authority. About those Mormons who married across races, Young stated that "If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain [blacks], the penalty under the law of God is death on the spot. This will always be so" (*Journal of Discourses*, 10:110); of those who are guilty of adultery, Young taught, "Let me suppose a case. 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" (*JofD*, 3:247); on stealing Young said, "If you want to know what to do with a thief that you may find stealing, I say kill him on the spot, and never suffer him to commit another iniquity" (*JofD.*, 1:108-109); Young's corporate teachings on the atonement are captured best by the following, "I could refer you to plenty of instances where men have been righteously slain in order to atone for their sins ... This is loving our neighbor as ourselves; if he needs help, help him; if he wishes salvation, and it is necessary to spill his blood upon the ground in order that he be saved, spill it" (*Deseret News*, April 16, 1856). He even went so far to say that it was as much his duty to shed a sinner's blood as it is to baptize him also! (*JofD* 1:108-9).

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p. 135-6.

animal sacrifices would be re-instated.<sup>27</sup> He completely misunderstood the whole point of the atonement. And all of this is only a natural result of teaching a doctrine as pitiful as that of a creature savior, who had he really been a creature, would have been incapable of saving anyone.

Let the atonement of the eternal Jesus Christ, which is sufficient unto salvation for all who believe in his name, be lifted on high! After all, Jesus, the perfect lamb who was without blemish (unlike our filthy selves), was the Christ, the very form of God (Phil. 2:5), the exact image of his person (Heb. 1:3), and over all, God blessed forever (Rom. 9:5). His sacrifice is sufficient for anyone who calls on his Name.

#### *The Adoration of Christ - Creature / Creator Distinction*

With regard to Christ's full deity, the New Testament disciple Thomas exclaimed to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, "My Lord and my God" (Jn. 20:28). These words are particularly revealing in light of the declarations of the rest of the scriptures. The angels, for example, are creatures made by our Great God and are not permitted to be worshipped (Rev. 22:8-9). In verse 9, the angel explains that the scriptures are clear that we are to worship God and only God.

The New Testament is clear that Jesus is the object of worship and praise, and that it is Christ who is God himself, incarnate<sup>28</sup>. Therefore, Christ is either a liar and a false teacher when he accepts a title of deity from, adoration of, or worship of believers or he is truly God Almighty, worthy of our reverence, praise, honor, and worship. Despite the truthfulness of the latter option, the Mormons must insist on the former.

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<sup>27</sup> Smith taught that "it is generally supposed that sacrifice was entirely done away when the Great Sacrifice was offered up, and that there will be no necessity for the ordinance of sacrifice in future: but those who assert this are certainly not acquainted with the duties, privileges and authority of the priesthood, or with the Prophets ... These sacrifices, as well as every ordinance belonging to the Priesthood, will, when the Temple of the Lord shall be built, and the sons of Levi be purified, be fully restored and attended to in all their powers, ramifications, and blessings" (Joseph Smith, *Documentary History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4:211).

<sup>28</sup> For some examples of our duty to worship Jesus Christ, see Matt. 2:11, 9:18, 14:31-33, 28:9-10, 28:16-20; John 5:23, 9:35-38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Phil 2:10-11, Heb. 1:6; 2 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 5:12.

Furthermore, every Christian would face condemnation before God if Jesus was not the Eternal Christ. From the days of the revelation of the Ten Commandments, God has been absolutely clear on three points (actually on 10, but 3 are pertinent to this discussion):

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
3. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. (Ex. 20:3-5)

God is a jealous God, who alone is to be worshipped (Ex. 34:14). We are not permitted to bow down to any of his creatures. Bowing to creation is seen by the Apostle Paul as one of the most grievous sins that man can commit (although he is clear that any sin is grievous to God and that each sin distinguishes us as sinful man in contrast to our Holy and Righteous God, no matter how great or small the sin may be.):

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;  
Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

**For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:**

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

**Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.** Amen. (Romans 1:18-25)

Clearly, worshipping creation is foolishness and plain idolatry. Since Christ is to be worshipped, it is a blatant lie to state that God was once created in time (literally born in time to a heavenly mother and father). To worship a created savior would be to exchange the truth of God for a lie, to turn to creation for salvation. Thus Jesus, the true Christ, was not created.

With a Christology as confusing, inconsistent and untruthful as that of the Latter-Day Saints one would expect to find confusion among the LDS people concerning whom they should pray to and direct worship. In fact, the LDS have not been clear throughout history regarding

whom they can and are to pray to and worship. Bruce McConkie has taught that Mormons are to pray only to the Father and worship only the Father. In my own interactions with Mormons I have gotten different answers from member to member. Is this not expected when Christ is viewed as the spirit-brother of Lucifer, merely a creation of God? Perhaps Thomas Oden states it best, "A messiah to whom one cannot pray is not the Christ of the New Testament."<sup>29</sup> So let the charge of God's Word, that we are to honor, pray and worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit each as equal persons of the Triune God be a comfort and peace to all who do just that.

### **God The Father: An exalted man**

A refutation of the Mormon teaching that God the Father came from a Father who became a God, who had a Father that became a God, etc ...is rather plain in light of the section already discussed concerning the eternity and immutability of God. These two biblically well-established doctrines prohibit a man-become God. Claiming, as did Joseph Fielding Smith, that "from everlasting to everlasting" only means from a finite pre-existence onward infinitely is absolutely absurd. Both Ps. 41:13 and 90:4 affirm this fact as they use everlasting twice in each verse to indicate an infinite past and an infinite future. In fact, the quotations made by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young both clearly indicate that these two men understood the term eternity as they both used "eternity" correctly. Joseph Smith explicitly stated that we have misunderstood that "God was God from all eternity." He is clearly rejecting sound biblical teaching, while affirming the fact that he understands what the word means.

Misunderstanding the unchanging God is perverted and dishonest. Believing in a changing God who at one time existed in time (and as a man, nonetheless) leads to polytheism, the deification of man, and a dismissal of the importance of the Incarnation.

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Word Of Life: Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1970) p. 49.

### How Many God's Are There - The Mormon Door To Polytheism?

Isaiah's writings in chapters 42-45 contain perhaps the clearest unrestricted language on the subject matter. In these chapters, God claims that there are no other gods (44:6, see also Ps. 86:10), that he is the first and the last (44:6), that he was from before the day was (43:13), that no gods were or will be formed before or after him (43:10), and that concerning the question of whether there be gods beside himself, that he - an omniscient Being - knows no other gods besides himself (44:8). As the book of Isaiah is one of the best supported books of the Bible by the most ancient and reliable manuscripts, there can be no question of what God is trying to reveal about himself<sup>30</sup>. What else could Isaiah be trying to convey in these chapters? Is it possible to sympathize with the Mormons who claim God "only means that he is the God of 'this world' "? No! For, where is there a single word in these three long chapters that would indicate such a limitation? In fact, " Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself" (Isa. 44:24, also 45:12). God created ALL things both in heaven and on earth. There is nothing that the Lord did not create, which would include the many gods of the Mormons if they existed.

### The Deification of Man

But, what about the statements of the early Church Fathers? Stephen Robinson seems to present some convincing evidence to indicate that this doctrine might have been taught in the early Church. First, it must be established that no matter what the church fathers taught throughout the history of the Church, any teacher is accountable to the Word of God. The question at hand is not whether a church father supported it or not, but rather is this sound

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<sup>30</sup> It is necessary that we not assert one part of the Word of God above another. All of God's Word is essential to understanding what he has revealed to us about himself. I am only making this point, that the authenticity of the book of Isaiah is one of the most easily supported books of the entire Bible, because of the LDS claim that there are many parts of the Bible that have been removed, changed and translated incorrectly - a completely unjustified and incorrect claim.

doctrine. No matter what father “X” says, the Bible holds ultimate authority. We would do well to answer questions as did Jesus Christ, “As it is written ...”

Yet, because of the great misrepresentation of the writings of the early church fathers, it is only appropriate that they receive a brief treatment, lest anyone run off and declare that “the church fathers even said.” Furthermore, an examination of what the early fathers were saying is very insightful and gets at another basic problem with the Mormon man-become-God.

The early church fathers, Irenaeus and Athanasius, are accurately quoted by Stephen Robinson. Regardless, we need to consider the whole of what these fathers taught. In fact, the argumentation by Robinson is deceptive because it does not even consider the entire quotation that he cites. From reading Robinson’s defense of a man become God, one would walk away with the impression that what Lorenzo Snow must have meant by, “As man is, God once was ...,” is that “As Man is, God once was incarnated as Jesus Christ.” However, the teaching of Lorenzo Snow and the LDS church is absolutely and undeniably not centered on the Incarnation of Christ. Their teaching is that God the Father was once a man.

On the contrary, the early church fathers based their statements on the incarnation, on the Word become flesh. Today’s universal Christian Church is the same. This approach of the church fathers is absolutely biblical as the scriptures declare that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Incarnation is the hope of man. Through it, believers are restored again in Christ as created in God’s image. Jesus Christ, the second Adam, is “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,” (Heb 1:3) and it is through living faith in him, God Incarnate, that man reflects God’s character (this is what the word image means - reflect [v] or reflection [n]).

Man is never deified, however, in the sense that the Mormons teach. Recall the words of Paul and Barnabus as they “rent their clothes” in disgust of people accrediting the work of God to them (Acts 14:14). There is a clear understanding in these verses that neither of them was of a “divine nature.” As great men as these children of God were, they were still mere men. Man

will always be man and God always God. Exalted and glorified the believer will be raised one day, yes. For, as many as received him, they are the sons of God by adoption into God's family through the saving work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ on the cross. But we will never become rulers of our own worlds, nor will we receive worship from future creations! We are not worthy of that. Instead we will take joy into eternity worshipping, honoring, and learning of our Father in Heaven.

This is one of the greatest distinctions between the Creator and the creature. Otherwise, the only thing Our Father has above us is time. For example, would it be safe to conclude that Ty Cobb had better talent than Pete Rose, simply because he hit 4,000 hits first; or, are your parents better are smarter than you, simply because they graduated from high school or college before you; or, are your older brothers or sisters better drivers than you because they received their driver's license first? Obviously not, as completing or accomplishing something first or ahead of someone else in time makes no one any better by nature than the other (even though Ty Cobb might have been better than Pete Rose). Similarly, if we were to become gods one day, God's only claim to greatness would be that he became God before us. By nature he would be no greater than we are. But, God is a greater God than that. He is a Sovereign, Holy and Omnipotent Creator who is God by nature. For that and that alone, let God be ever praised! This biblical view of man created in God's image rather than God in man's is not Mormon doctrine and it is clearly not what Smith, Young, Hyde, or Snow taught.

### *The Incarnation - God's Sharing in Our Humanity*

In fact, what is the Incarnation reduced to if we are to look at our Father in Heaven as an exalted man? In that case, could we really share in the beautiful joy and knowledge that Christ was made for a little while lower than the angels (Heb. 2:7) and suffered with us in our temptations and suffering (Heb. 2:9-10, 17)? Or is it truly amazing that he is our Great High Priest, with whom we can share our emotions and concerns (Heb. 4:14-15)? This could not be a wonderful thing for the author of Hebrews to state if his Father in Heaven was once a man and

already shared in our sufferings and trials. If the Father already did this, then what is the point of the Incarnation? Christ then would not be the pioneer or author of our salvation (Heb. 2:10 - "captain" in the KJV), as his fathers and great great great ...great grandfathers would have already been pioneers. This is clearly a different God and Father than that preached in the Bible. It is a different gospel, for nowhere in the Bible is there even an inkling of an indication that we can find comfort in the suffering of a Father who was once a man, or who suffered or was tempted. More importantly, this is a different Heavenly Father and God than him who is immutable and eternal as described by the Bible. It is a different Jesus, as Christ uniquely partook of the human nature (mind, spirit, emotions, body, etc ..). This is how Christ conquered death for us (Heb. 2:14). It is the beauty of the gospel, God become Man, fully God and fully Man, but never Man become God!

## **Conclusion**

The Mormon church has redefined the word eternity to mean something different than that which even Joseph Smith and Brigham Young clearly understood it to mean. In fact, changing scriptures and changing definitions of words are part of the basic Mormon strategy used to displace the True Gospel with their own version of “good?” news. Consequently, they teach of a God who progressed from manhood to godhood, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Arianistic Jesus who was pro-created just like us by sexual relations between a polygamist God the Father and one of many his many heavenly wives, and a deified human nature. In fact, it is hard to find a distinction between man and God in Mormonism, other than time. The Mormon man understands his current state as a temporary one, after which he will become a god, capable of procreating spirit children, creating a world of his own with plural celestial wives, and receiving worship just the same as the God of the Bible demands worship of us in this lifetime. God did the same exact thing, according to the LDS, and his best attribute above our own future exalted state would be that he accomplished exactly what we will, but first<sup>31</sup>.

As a result, the role of the atonement of Jesus Christ, his Incarnation and his absolute divine nature are all discounted by the Mormon gospel. One ought to also question whether or not the Mormons really have a basis for opposing evolution, when they teach that men can become gods. Would it not bring more glory to god if he were once a single celled prokaryote that evolved into a God, rather than simply a God that evolved from a man? After all, would it be anything besides luck or chance that the Mormon “Father In Heaven” beat today’s LDS in the race for godhood?

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<sup>31</sup> Technically, we can not even use the word “first,” since God’s father’s father’s ...father was closer to being first!