

## Mormon Elders at Your Door

The appeal of the LDS Church is simple. Through very well packaged, warm advertising, they propose to provide answers to family problems and a promise for each person's future. These two issues are the closest to anyone's heart, and therefore have a powerful appeal. In fact, these two issues ought to be the center of any Christian's appeal, since they are central to the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ provides the only answer to sin, and leads to eternal life; and living by Biblical instruction leads to strong, unified families. What more could be asked?

When the elders (young Mormons performing their two year missionary service) come to visit, they present an attractive picture. They are clean-cut, neatly dressed, polite, and very sincere. Their testimony comes from the heart. Such sincerity is convincing to many people. When coupled with the apparent instruction in James 1:5, it gains additional power. And it is sincerely wrong.

Sincerity is no guarantee of truth (Q1). A Buddhist may sincerely believe in his religion, and a Catholic in his. Both are quite sincere, and, as we saw in our section on Catholicism, both are sincerely wrong. The same applies to Mormonism. Its sincerity is no indication of its truth or falsity. Truth is measured by absolute standards. We will examine them shortly.

Our first task (Q2) is to determine James' audience. He begins his epistle by greeting the "twelve tribes who have been scattered abroad" (v.1). This sounds like the Jews until he calls them "brethren" (v.2) and compliments their faith (v.3). It is now clear that James is addressing believers as "Israel". These are not people who need to know the truth. They already have the truth. Their problem is knowing how to use the truth when they are tempted (v.2). This is the reason for the exhortation in verse 5. Wisdom (Q3) is the proper use of knowledge, and this is what the believers will need as they walk their Christian path.

The truth is contained in the word of God, delivered to the church by the apostles (Q4). But even that message is not absolutely essential, since the gospel in nature is evident to all. But for those who have the word of God, we must remember that the word given by the prophets of old is the absolute standard. Any teaching contrary to it is to be rejected. Also, the Old Testament is enough for "wisdom for salvation in Christ Jesus". Any New Testament teaching will be in agreement with the Old. In the same way, any new prophet will teach in a manner strictly in accordance with the light already presented. For the BOM to present truth, it must in every way agree with the Bible. No contradictions can be accepted.

If we stray from God's word to things that seem right to us (Q5) we are on a path that leads to death. This foolish action puts us in a position where we are relying on our own heart, which will lie to us. Our only safety is to rely on the word of God (Q6) which is a tested guide. Those who trust God's word will be rewarded. His words will not pass away. We must be careful in our study never to add to or take away from His word.

LDS missionaries claim to have a testimony from the Holy Spirit regarding the truth of the BOM and Joseph Smith. Yet this testimony is at odds with the teaching of scripture. Since the Holy Spirit is the "spirit of truth" (Q7), the testimony of the LDS Elders is NOT from the Holy Spirit. If we follow the recommendation to pray for truth about the BOM to be revealed (Q8) we are *testing God*. When the evidence is clear that the BOM is false, to pray asking for a testimony of its truth is to ask God to lie. It is a denial of our faith in God. Why would we want to do this?

A problem arises (Q9) when we try to use any modern translation of the Bible to witness to Mormons. They have an established position that only the Joseph Smith Translation is accurate. Thus any reading contrary to the JST will be rejected. Fortunately, we have more than enough material in the JST to show the errors of Mormonism. God provided truth in so many forms and places that it was impossible for Joseph Smith to revise it all away. In fact, most of his revisions are trivial. Similarly, since the BOM is regarded as scripture, it can be useful for us to use it as well. When Smith first wrote it, his theology was largely conventional Christianity, and so there are many passages where current LDS theology is contradicted.

Once we show that the JST supports true Christianity, and that the modern translations we use say the same things, we can move forward to show how these modern translations are actually closer to the original than the KJV or JST. They approach the idea of translation as if the Bible had been translated from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to German to English. Obviously, if that had happened, the resulting text would have lost a lot of its original content. However, we know the text of the original Greek and Hebrew with a very high degree of confidence. We also know far more about the original languages than Tyndale

(major translator of the KJV) or Joseph Smith did. The result is that we have very highly reliable modern language translations which can serve as an accurate guide for our study. This cannot be said for the BOM, since even though it is supposed to be a perfect translation from its original, done with the aid of divine translating stones, it has been revised at least twice since its original 1830 publication, each time with major changes in the content of the text.

Mormons will frequently try to get around various clear scriptural statements. This is done by adding to the text phrases as shown in Question 10. This method would allow the reader to change any text to any meaning he chose, and is condemned in the book of Revelation. The word of God is true as it is written. Since our thoughts are so far below God's it is the height of arrogance for humans to propose to add to or subtract from the word of God. We must accept it as it is written. This is the example given to us by Christ. Twenty-four times we find Jesus using the phrase "it is written" as an introduction to defense of a position. (This does not count variations.) Each time Christ uses the text as it is written, and that is good enough. We should always emulate His example.

The gospel of Jesus Christ was not and could not be stamped out of the earth as taught by the LDS Church. That would require that the gates of hell prevail against His church in contradiction to Matt 16:18 (Q11). Jesus said that His words would never pass away. The gospel (Q12) says that Jesus 1) died for our sins, 2) was buried, and 3) was raised from the dead. No part of the gospel has ever been lost from the earth (Q13). Nor has any of it been left out. Paul tells us explicitly that he has told us everything. The gospel was known in detail even in ancient times, long before Christ. The entire sanctuary system pointed forward to the cross, and details of Christ's death, burial and resurrection are contained in hundreds of OT prophecies. But this is dramatically different from saying that part of the Bible was lost. Many scholars believe that Paul wrote a letter to Laodicea that has been lost. If we had it it would almost certainly be part of the Bible. Does that mean that we are missing something necessary for salvation? Heaven forbid! Paul himself (Q14) tells us that all the Philippian jailer needed was belief in Christ. Confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and has been raised from the dead is sufficient for salvation. Even those who did not have the law can be saved because of the evidence of God in nature.

"Witnessing to Mormons is like trying to climb Jell-O: It's hard to get a foothold."\* They will take every opportunity to try to make words into something they do not mean or to avoid the plain meaning of scripture. They will also take words which seem straightforward and use them with different meanings than those in scripture. As we continue to study we will come across several such examples. In particular, they will quote from the Articles of Faith.

#3 We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, *by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.*

#4 We believe that the *first principles and ordinances of the Gospel* are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, *Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins*, fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Emphasis added)

Notice that the definition of the gospel is dramatically different than that given by Paul. When we see the difference between scripture and LDS definitions, we should be careful to define the terms by using the scriptures. Then, when the definitions are clear, we can show that the LDS definitions are contrary to God's word, and therefore without light (Q15). Our task then becomes one of showing the true gospel and praying that the Holy Spirit will lead the Mormon to an acceptance of the truth.

\*Matthew Slick, M. Div., "Christian Apologetics Notebook" <http://www.carm.org>