

The LDS Plan of Salvation, Part III

As we have studied the LDS Church, it has become apparent that it redefines words which have well accepted definitions in the Christian community. Nowhere is this more evident than in the definition of "salvation". When we try to witness to Mormons, these redefinitions make communication very difficult. As has been said about the English and Americans, we are two peoples separated by a common language.

This communication problem is what requires a more full understanding of LDS theology by the Christian attempting to work with Mormons. It is entirely possible to say that we believe in the cross as the way to salvation, gain full agreement from a Mormon, and find that absolutely no communication has taken place. Both parties fully agree with the statement, but there is no actual agreement between them when the terms are fully defined. It is this difficulty which led Matthew Slick M. Div. (Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry) to declare that "Witnessing to Mormons is like trying to climb Jell-O. It's hard to get a foothold."

In LDS theology (Q1), essentially all men will be saved. This is what is known as "general salvation". Nothing whatever is required to take advantage of this, not even belief. As long as you are not one of the "sons of perdition" (a term reserved for extremely evil former Mormons who now work against Mormonism), you will receive immortality. This is not to be confused with "conditional salvation", which accrues to the good Mormon as a result of his obedience to the "gospel" (LDS of course), which grants him a place in the celestial kingdom. This is explicitly stated to be NOT salvation by grace alone. We will discuss this more in a moment.

We should contrast the LDS view of general salvation with the Biblical teaching (Q2). It could not be more clear than Jesus' own words in John 3:16. There He states that salvation is for believers. He does not there identify that unbelievers will be destroyed, although He does say so in numerous other places. That belief is the sole essential to salvation is reiterated by Paul (Q3) when he says that "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified". James' discussion of works (James 2) shows that faith which is not followed up by living that faith (works) is not truly faith. The works do not save the sinner, they show that the sinner has faith in his Savior.

The LDS plan of progression places all men in one of two places: Paradise or Spirit Prison. Good Mormons in Paradise go to the Spirit Prison to teach (1 Peter 3:19?) those who either did not or could not accept the LDS gospel during life on earth. At the end of time, all men will be judged. Only the "sons of perdition" will actually be destroyed along with Satan and his angels. (We should wonder how a god who does not have the power to create or destroy the spirit can do so here.) The rest of men are resurrected to eternal life. Wicked people who did not accept Mormonism either in this life or in spirit prison go to the "telestial kingdom". Good people who did not accept Mormonism go to the "terrestrial kingdom". Neither group has the possibility to progress to godhood, but will have a wonderful life in eternity in a kingdom with glories beyond imagination. Good Mormons go to the "celestial kingdom". There, if they were "sealed" to their wives in "celestial marriage", they can have spirit children, create a new universe, and become gods. The cycle of sin and salvation will start over, and the victory will never be won over sin.

Put simply, the LDS cross gives immortality to everyone (Q4). After that, everything is salvation by works. However, we must again remember that the Mormon will deny that it is salvation by works, since in their view (general) salvation comes to everyone by the cross. At this point, we must note another definition which is changed. Damnation in the Biblical sense refers to the fact that the wicked will be destroyed. To a Mormon, it means anything less than exaltation to godhood. Therefore, a Mormon can both say that even moderately wicked people have salvation and that everyone but the saints will be damned. Such a statement would be explicitly contradictory when using conventional definitions, but, when you (re)write the rules to suit your own purposes, you can make anything say anything.

In 1 Corinthians 15 (Q5), Paul explores the nature of the resurrection and immortality. His discussion passes through an exploration of different degrees of glory on its way to the exposition of our transformation from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible. He mentions three degrees of glory (sun, moon, and stars). Joseph Smith seized on this to create the three kingdoms (celestial, terrestrial, and telestial). In fact, Paul doesn't stop at three levels of glory, since he says that "star differs from star in glory". A careful devotion to literalness would require thousands of kingdoms, since there are thousands of visible stars.

Had Smith observed the context of Paul's discussion, he would have realized that Paul was developing an A:B comparison. The saints will be remade in the in "the image of the heavenly". Since there is only one true God, we will be remade in His image, just as Adam was originally. With one God and one image of God, there can only be one heaven. Just as we saw with the RCC, the LDS Church uses scripture when it suits them, and ignores it when it is inconvenient. By ignoring context, they are able to make scripture say anything. We are to be students who look for what God has placed in scripture (2 Tim 2:15), not men who place their own thoughts and plans above God (Gal 1:6-7, 2 Pet 3:15-16).

Unlike the human LDS gospel, the true gospel (Q6) first shows that we have earned death, but Jesus died for us, making available the free gift of eternal life. The wicked will get what they have earned: death. But even the saints have wicked hearts, so the Holy Spirit dwells in the saints, converting them into true saints by renewing them in the form of God. This transformation will be complete when Christ comes the second time. This change is only by grace through faith. When people try to be saved by their works (Q7), they are examined by their works. They are compared to the absolute standard of the law, and since all have sinned (Rom 3:23), they will be found wanting and will be thrown in the lake of fire where they will be destroyed.

The final insult to the gospel is brought by the doctrine of the blood atonement. In essence, the LDS church denies the possibility of cross being a complete atonement for sin. There are certain sins that are so awful that the only way to be saved after committing them is to have your own blood shed for them. In other words, you must be killed to pay for your sin. Jesus death on the cross is not enough to pay the penalty. While the historical record of this is uncertain, there is credible evidence that several LDS men were killed for this purpose, most likely by Brigham Young. It is curious that the sin for which they submitted to this was adultery after an original repentance and admission to the church. This was during a time when plural marriage was practiced, and when it was possible to have another man's wife as your spiritual wife, all while remaining in good standing in the church.

John's statement (Q8) that Jesus will "cleanse us from all unrighteousness" stands in stark contrast to this LDS doctrine. The cross is a complete and perfect sacrifice for all sin. The denial of this fact stands as a sentinel. When man puts his own ideas above God's, all is lost. When man creates his own god in place of the true god, the "gospel" will be as lacking as man is. In the LDS case, their god cannot eliminate sin in the universe. The "god cycle" proves this. But even worse, he cannot eliminate sin here! This is such compounded hopelessness that it is beyond comprehension. We have to find a way to show Mormons the truth of the cross. Love for our fellow man can do no less.

We close with a variation on Pascal's wager. In its original form, it states that the atheist has nothing to gain from atheism, since if he is correct, all is lost. On the other hand, the Christian has nothing to lose by being Christian, since if he is correct, he gains everything. If he is wrong, he is no worse off than the atheist.

In the LDS version, if the Christian is correct, the Mormon is lost. He does stand to gain slightly if he is correct, since his exaltation will be greater than that of the Christian. The Christian loses almost nothing if the Mormon is correct, since the terrestrial kingdom has glory beyond imagination. Why should anyone risk it all by being a Mormon instead of a Christian, when that position places him at so much risk? I know that such logic is of little benefit in witnessing, but it remains a puzzle. When the truth is so clear, why should anyone deliberately ignore it to go into such jeopardy? Can it be that Mormons are trying to be first in the kingdom, and in remaking God in man's image have entirely missed it?