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What's the Best Way to Talk to Mormon Missionaries about Their View of Baptism?

March 6, 2023



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about the best way to talk to Mormon missionaries about their view of baptism and their belief that only they have the authority to baptize.

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Transcript

(music) (bell rings) I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Koukl and you're listening to Stand to Reason's #STRaskpodcast. Good morning, Amy. Good morning, Greg.

Well, Greg, in our last episode. Amy. (laughs) Strangely enough, and I did not expect this, the topic of Mormon baptism came up.

And I actually have a question about that. So we're going to start with that in this episode. And this comes from Beth Ball.

What's the best way to talk to Mormon missionaries about their view of baptism? I know they believe you have to have, quote, the priesthood to baptize, but that doesn't make sense to me. They also say Adam was baptized, but how? When Jesus hadn't even been baptized, and who baptized him? Well, this isn't my specialty, first of all. And what's, I'll tell you one of the difficulties here is we have New Testament teaching on baptism, okay? On my take, it's pretty straightforward that it's what we know called Christian baptism.

In other words, baptism is appropriate for those who become Christians, believe in Jesus, and then identify with the body of Christ and publicly testify to their faith by publicly being baptized, okay? The alternative is infant baptism, which is not my view that's taught in the Bible. So basically, we have Christian baptism as a standard. That can't be denied because we see it in the New Testament number of places and in the book of

Acts.

So that's Christian baptism, and then we have detail about what baptism in a certain sense prefigures, and this is in the book of Romans, okay? So there we go. So we have baptism, all right? Now we have another group that identifies, in some sense, with Christianity, but denies much of the doctrinal foundation of Christianity. In fact, when it comes to Mormonism and for those who are not familiar with the details, this may surprise you.

Mormonism is not a subset of Christianity. It is a totally different religion. In fact, there's almost no point at which Mormon doctrine intersects Christian doctrine.

I'm not even sure about the resurrection. I would already presume, well, they believe Jesus rose from the dead. We believe Jesus rose from the dead.

It was bodily resurrection, bodily resurrection, I guess. But they've, in a certain sense, changed, twisted, maligned, distorted. So many other details of Christianity, it wouldn't surprise me.

Maybe you know Iron A, Amy, because you have much more depth in Mormonism, whether that's been changed too. But the important thing here is it is a totally different religion. And so there is, and I don't mean this in a glib fashion, but they just mean it descriptively, they give lip service to the Bible.

In other words, the Bible counts when it fits with all the other revelation that Mormons are given through their Mormon hierarchy, Joseph Smith being principal, but also the apostles since then. And so the Bible is not their central source of information. Then what they do oftentimes is just read back into the Bible other doctrines.

And so the difficulty you have is you have a Christian using the Bible as the authoritative source of information about spiritual things. And then you have the Mormon making all these other claims. That was pointed out in the question, "Have nothing to do with any scripture Adam was baptized?" Really? Where's that? And who baptized him? You know, and all kinds of other questions.

Well, in a certain sense, those questions are going to be irrelevant when there is a separate source of authority that's brought in, because the answer could be, "Well, that's what Joseph Smith said or one of the apostles." Or, "This comes from one of our authoritative writings." And so what you end up having at least at one level is a conflict between authorities. Excuse me. So it's easier to deal with when something about Mormonism seems to contradict directly what the scripture teaches.

And then you can go back to scripture and say, "You guys believe in the Bible. The Bible says this. You say this."

How do you reconcile that?" It's much more difficult when they have extra biblical information. And because you can't go back to the Bible and say, "Well, the Bible speaks against that. It says something contrary because in some cases the Bible doesn't speak at all." And other times it speaks in an obscure way.

What about those who are baptized for the dead? First Corinthians 15. If there's no resurrection. Now my understanding is that that's a reference to a pagan practice.

And Paul is just using that to demonstrate even pagans believe in the resurrection. But even so, even if that's a mysterious passage, what we can't do is extract all kinds of doctrine about baptism for the dead. That applies to Christians or believers or Mormons who get saved after they die because someone else baptizes them by proxy.

Okay. So a big part of this confusion is a conflict between authorities. And that's where the trouble is.

And I think there's also a little bit of a misleading practice. And again, I'm choosing my words advisedly here. I think it is misleading.

When people are enjoined to pray to have a burning in the bosom about the legitimacy of the Book of Mormon, which is not principally doctrinal. And then they have this experience that connects him with the Book of Mormon. They join Mormonism and then a whole bunch of other books, which are doctrinal and contrary to Scripture, then kind of come along for the ride and they buy into all of that.

And then they end up buying into a false version of Christianity. And there are lots and lots of those false versions. In every case where you have false characterizations of Christianity, you have an additional authority source that turns out to trump Scripture.

So my case, if I'm going to be making the case on these things, I'm going to be making the case from the Bible. Okay. And looking for opportunity or looking for at the contrary doctrines, like the ones that were mentioned here, and asking where in the New Testament, where in the Old Testament, where anywhere in the biblical take of things, do we get the idea that this is going on and has the kind of spiritual ramifications that you say it has? And here we can attempt to hold their feet to the fire since there is, again, I think kind of lip service given to the Scriptures.

We believe in the Bible as long as it's properly translated. Well, who wouldn't agree with that point? You know, I don't believe in a Bible that's not properly translated. But so there's this little not given.

And then all the rest of their doctrines are driven by other things. And when they find a verse that seems to support that, like the verse Corinthians 15, then they're going to seize on that. And the issue of whether it's properly translated seems to be lost in the shuffle there.

That's why I think it's a disingenuous comment. All those verses that seem at first blush to support some of their unusual doctrine, "Oh, those must be properly translated." And all those ones that go against, "Well, those must not be properly translated." Actually, I don't think they even go through that thinking process, which just demonstrates that that particular qualification about the Bible is as I put it disingenuous. So maybe you have more to say about this, Amy.

I don't know that there is a kind of a snappy rejoinder every one of these kind of unique things that Mormons bring up about baptism, etc. And I think what we have to do is establish the Bible as the authority, which they say is one of their authorities. And then we have to, at the same time, demonstrate what the Bible teaches about the core issues, which, by the way, is not hard.

But just FYI, I wrote a piece six or seven or eight years ago answering this question is Mormonism a denomination of Christianity? Just another denomination, I think. Something like that. Yeah, but the idea is, is it a subset of Christianity? If it is, then it has to have all these things in common with all other religions, denominations that are subsets, even though it has its particular distinctives.

That's what a subset means. Turns out that it's not a subset in any way, shape, or form. And I don't argue that Mormonism is false and Christianity is true in that piece.

I'm not addressing that question. I'm just saying, is it fair to say that Mormonism is Christian? If Mormonism is Christian, then none of us who thought they were Christian and not Mormons are Christian. Because the religions are entirely different entirely.

So you might check that out on our website as a resource. And I draw all of my information from a summary book of Mormon doctrines coming from Deseret Press, which is their press. And it's the authoritative statement.

It's called LDS beliefs. I think it's the title of the book and any of it. Well, Greg, that's definitely the foundation of any discussion is that we established that we are, we are acting according to the Bible.

We are learning our doctrine from the Bible. So let's go to the Bible and find out if it's different. So in this case for the question about the best way to talk to Mormon missionaries about their view of baptism, I think there are two issues here.

One is, how should we talk to them about baptism? And the other one is their view of authority. And she mentioned this, their view of the authority of the elders to baptize. And that the rest of the Christian churches don't have that authority so they don't have real baptism.

So those are two different things, but they are related. Because my answer to anything when I'm talking about the Mormon church and an aspect of their theology is that what I

want to do is show them how they have replaced Jesus with some other system. So instead of Jesus being our priests, now they have their priests in the Aaronic priesthood, the Melchizedek priesthood, they have their own priests.

Instead of Jesus being our salvation, now they have all these rules they have to follow so that they can make themselves righteous. And this goes on and on, and this shows up in baptism also. And in fact, the topic of baptism is such a good way to contrast our gospel with their gospel.

And I'm going to explain what I mean by that. In Romans 6, it talks about how we died with Christ. In our baptism, we died with Christ.

We're identified with Christ. We're joined to Christ. And we're raised with Him to new life.

And it says, our old self was crucified with Him in order that our body of sin might be done away with so that we would no longer be slaves to sin, for he who has died is freed from sin. So in Christ, we are freed from our sin and we are enabled to live a life bearing fruit for God. So that is our view of baptism.

Our view of baptism is being united with Christ and having all the benefits of Christ given to us by grace. And that is what is shown. That's what's depicted in our baptism.

So you can start off by explaining that. Take them to Romans 6. Read through Romans 6. Talk about what baptism is and being united with Christ is and how He is the one who saves us. And by the way, part of this is to demonstrate by contrast the difference between biblical Christian baptism, the theological significance of it, Romans 6, and what the Mormons teach regarding baptism.

Right. And this is where it's just such a perfect contrast. And I did not realize this until, I don't know, the last several years, but here is what their baptism is.

I'm going to read a quote from Bruce McConkie in the book Mormon Doctrine. Baptism is the formally appointed means and ordinance, which the Lord has provided so that man can signify. Okay.

So this is what their baptism signifies. So that man can signify his personal acceptance of all of the terms and conditions of the eternal gospel covenant, thus in baptism, man covenants to abide by all of the laws and requirements of the whole gospel. You're buying into their work system.

Yeah, it's a completely different thing. You're agreeing to follow their laws. You're not being joined to Christ and he does all the work for you in saving you and giving you righteousness.

You're actually agreeing that I'm going to, it's like the Mosaic Law. I'm going to do these

things and receive these benefits. So nothing could be a greater, simple demonstration of the difference between Christianity and Mormonism.

So you could ask them, what does baptism mean to you? Because they will likely know this if they've been a Mormon their whole life. They'll know what baptism means. They probably don't know what you mean by baptism.

And that's the thing. We don't realize what the other person is thinking when these words come up. And this is such an interesting distinction right here.

Yeah. I get frustrated when I talk about LDS and part of it is because of what Francis Schaeffer used to call the semantic mysticism, all the different language and all the same words. Different meanings.

Okay. And here baptism, baptism. Oh, it means one thing in the New Testament.

It means honorably different things here. And time and time again, we run into that difficulty, this semantic mysticism. And it's frustrating because the biblical teaching is so rich, theologically, and ties to our rescue.

And this, what you just read, is really ties baptism to imprisonment, not rescue to a whole system that you have to produce. McConkey, by the way, is one of their, well, I don't know if he's fallen out of favor. He's fallen a little bit out of favor.

But he's, if you want like tomes of characterization of LDS doctrine, he used to be the guy. Okay. And that's why I went to LDS beliefs with those are oppressed rather than McConkey when I did my own piece because I wanted to get the more up to date characterization of it, or at least one that they consider more up to date.

But the problem with, with organizations that make the authority claim that they make is you can't really up to date things because this was God speaking to their people about eternal theological verity. No, this is the way it is. You can't come along 20, 30, 40 years later and say, well, we changed our mind on that, you know, or God changed his mind.

To me, that creates a problem. There are very rare exceptions where that happened. You have an old covenant.

You have a new covenant. But this is very, very clear in the scriptures as you understand the relationship of the covenants. But when you have organizations like this that are just kind of changing things as they go along saying, well, God gave us a new revelation.

What about all those other folk that were going on God's word in another system or another time? And this to me is just another evidence that what we have as a manmade system that's adjusting and adapting by human winds, whim, and maybe cultural pressures. So I want to address now the question of authority because now that you

know that their goal is to covenant to follow these certain laws so that they will make it to the highest level of heaven. Now the idea of authority makes sense because they're not.

This is something that that Christians get a little bit confused by when a Mormon says, well, how do you know your church is the true church? And as Christians, we think, why are they asking that question? That's so odd. And the reason why is that they're not thinking of this as being united to Christ thing and that we're all brothers and sisters and the Lord. They're thinking there's a system you have to follow.

There's no organization. And which organization has the correct system with the right authority to do the right things to get me to the right place. So that's why they care about authority.

But here's another example when the issue of authority comes up where you can exalt Jesus and say, look, your church is replacing Jesus as our high priest with your priests. And this is a problem because for one thing, if you read through Hebrew seven through ten, it talks about the fact that where under the Mosaic law, they had human priests who had to keep their lives. And so, the reason why they're not living in the priest who had to keep offering sacrifices for their own sin.

Now, we have Jesus who is a high priest who lives forever, so he never has to be replaced. That's it. He is our priest.

And in fact, it says, he's the order of Melchizedek because he lives forever. He's not living forever. Jesus is the one priest.

Hebrews makes this really clear. So this is another example of substituting something else for the rule that Jesus should be playing in our lives. So you can point this out in the baptism.

You can point this out in the authority. And the goal is to show them who Jesus is, to make them see that they're missing the greatness of him and what he's done for us. And we're placing it with these lesser things.

You know, Romans eight talks about in seven and eight talk about how the law was weak to make us do anything. Because, well, we were weak. The law was good.

The law was made weak because of our weakness. Well, it didn't give us the ability. Right.

I'm not saying this right. But yes, so the idea is that without the Holy Spirit, we are trapped because even if we want to do good, the law doesn't give us the ability to do good. But the whole beauty of the new... It just shows us what good is.

Right. The whole beauty of the new covenant is that now we have the Holy Spirit. We are joined to Christ.

We have the Spirit of Christ. And now we're enabled to live, but we're also free of condemnation. Right.

And so all of this bearing fruit for God is all coming out of a place of already being joined to him forever. And so if you can give them a glimpse of that, they have no idea what we believe about these things. And a lot of them think we believe the same thing about a lot of things.

And they're surprised when they find out we don't. I've had that experience, right? So it could be as simple as just keep asking them what they think about this and then showing them what the Bible says about this. And I've just found that Hebrew 7 through 10 is so clear about the role of Jesus as our priest.

That would be a great passage to go through to talk about authority. He has the authority and we're joined in him. Good work.

Well, thank you, Beth. That took the whole episode. It was worth it, though.

Yes. It's one of my favorite topics. So I can go on a bit of it.

Well, thank you for your question. If you have a question, send it on to me. Actually, two of your favorite topics.

One LDS, the other, the grace of God. And this is true. Christ here.

I guess those aren't bad things to be addressed. And incidentally, the reason why I'm so interested in Mormonism is because it highlights those things for me. And when I read about what they believe, I'm able to see so much more clearly the value of what I have.

Sometimes that helps when you see how you get so used to seeing the same thing. And you don't realize that not everyone is experiencing what you're experiencing and knows what you know. And then when you read about how they view God and their life as a religious believer in Mormonism, it just makes you appreciate all the more the grace of God.

Yeah. All right. That's it.

Send us your questions on Twitter with the hashtag #SDR. Ask or go through our website. We look forward to hearing from you.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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