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7 Reasons Why Mormonism and Christianity Are Not the Same

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Though the language sounds similar at times, the beliefs are quite distinct. Mormons do not understand history, God, man, salvation, heaven, hell, the cross, Jesus, or the Trinity as the canonical Scriptures teach, nor do they agree with the conciliar doctrine taught by the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church over the last two thousand years.

In this article, Kevin outlines the historical and theological distinctions between Mormonism and Christianity.

Transcript

(music) Welcome to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung. Today I want to read an article, a new article, on clearly reformed.

If you've not been there, you should check out clearlyreform.org. Lots of resources there, including unique articles and hopefully more of them to come in the future. This one is entitled 7 Reasons Why Mormonism and Christianity Are Not the Same. What prompted posting this article was a comment I saw a few days ago, and it may have just been circulated.

It may have happened a month or maybe even last year, but that a prominent Christian had made this statement that he was willing to die on the hill that Christianity and Mormonism were the same. Or that they worship the same Jesus, something to that effect, which made me want to say a little bit more about that in a way that hopefully is helpful not for that particular statement so much, because those come and go, but that would help Christians understand what Mormonism teaches and why Christianity and Mormonism are not the same, hence this article. The aim of this article is to provide a brief overview of Mormon history and theology.

My purpose is not to debunk Mormonism or to prove Christianity, but I hope this quick survey will demonstrate that the two are not the same. A quick note on secondary

sources, Christian materials do not always treat Mormonism fairly or go the extra mile to present Mormon ideas as a Mormon would recognize them. One book that does do this well is Andrew Jackson's *Mormonism explained what Latter-day Saints teach and practice*.

I also recommend a different *Jesus the Christ of the Latter-day Saints* by BYU professor Robert Millet. Richard Mao concedes too much in his foreword and afterward from a Christian perspective, self proclaimed evangelical perspective, but the book is still very helpful to get Mormon Christology from a Mormon himself. Mormon history.

Joseph Smith was born in rural Vermont in 1805, the fourth of nine children. With little success farming in Vermont, the Smith family moved west to Palmyra, New York. There Joseph Smith was exposed to different revival movements and most of his family became Presbyterians, though Smith later said he leaned toward Methodism.

The presence of so many variations of Christianity bothered Smith. Which one was right? How could he choose? At one revival meeting, a preacher quoted from James 1-5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and up rateeth not, and it shall be given him." Smith, 14 years old at the time, went home, reflected on these words, and went into the woods to pray. According to Mormon tradition, this is when Joseph Smith had his first vision.

In this vision, which is foundational to the Mormon faith, Smith claimed to see two "personages," that's what he called them. The one God the Father pointed to the other and said, "This is my beloved son, hear him." Smith asked them what sect he should join. They answered that he should join none of them.

They were all wrong. All their creeds were an abomination, and all their believers were corrupt. Three years later, Mormons believed Smith received another vision.

In this vision, the angel Moroni told Smith of golden plates buried under a hill near Palmyra. The plates were revealed in 1827, when Smith was provided with two reading crystals, Urim and Thumim, by which he could translate the writing. Smith claimed the plates were written in hieroglyphics.

In 1830, Smith published the *Book of Mormon*, which contains the story of the lost Israelites who migrated to America in the 6th century BC, but were killed in battle in AD 428. Smith later received another vision from John the Baptist, giving him the Aaronic priesthood. That same year, 1830, Smith founded the Church of Christ.

In 1838, he changed the name to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Smith continued to receive revelations, telling him to move from New York to Ohio to Missouri, and eventually to Illinois, where he and his followers built a town called Nauvoo. Their Smith and his followers tried to live out a utopian vision of society.

They also instituted polygamy, as early Mormon leaders argue that Jesus had had many wives. Smith and his brother were arrested in 1844. Later, a mob stormed the jail and killed them both.

Mormons consider Smith a martyr. Others say he died in a violent shootout. Following Smith's death, there was a schism.

Small group, called Josephites, became the reorganized Church with headquarters in Missouri. Most followed Brigham Young, who became their first president and prophet. In 1847, Young took the followers to Utah and built Salt Lake City.

Today, according to LDS figures, there are nearly 17 million Mormons worldwide, with about 7 million living in the United States. Mormonism is the largest new religious movement from the West since Christianity, which can be said more accurately to have come from the Near East. Mormonism is also the first homegrown American religion.

Mormonism continues to grow, though the growth rate has considerably slowed. Because of its missionary impulse, its relatively high birth rate and its commitment to doctrinal and ethical distinctives. Mormon theology.

Let me highlight seven areas of Mormon doctrine. I won't try to refute the Mormon position, but more basically, I hope you'll be able to see the explicit and often intentional deviation from historic Christianity. One, view of history.

In Mormon thinking, the rise of Mormonism was not merely a reformation or a renewal of the Church. It was a complete restoration. Following the death of Christ's apostles, the Church fell into complete apostasy.

The Church lost divine authority and true doctrine. There was no unbroken continuity from the early Church to the present. Christianity, for almost all of its history, was false and without the truth until Joseph Smith and his revelation.

Mormonism not only rejects historic Orthodox Christianity, the entire religion is based on the need for such repudiation. So their view of history is different. With the reformation, there was always a very explicit intentional appeal to the history of the Church.

In fact, the Reformers argue that we are the Catholic Church, small C Catholic. We are the ones who are in line with this great tradition. Of course, Roman Catholics disagree with that, but there has always been an insistence that this is part of a 2000-year work of the Spirit.

And Mormonism understands Church history very differently. Two, view of revelation. Mormons believe the Bible, the King James Version, but do not consider it inerrant.

Neither do they consider the Bible complete. What makes Mormonism unique is their

belief in continuing revelations sustained through prophets, seers, and revelators. So while Mormons affirm the Bible, they also affirm the inspiration of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

Through an elaborate hierarchy of 1st Presidency, 12 Apostles, 1st Quorum of the 70, and 2nd Quorum of the 70, Mormons can receive authoritative interpretations and new authoritative revelations. So this is a very different view of the canon and of Revelation. 3, view of man.

According to Mormon theology, men and women are the spirit sons and daughters of God. We lived in a pre-mortal spirit existence before birth. In this first estate, we grew and developed in preparation for the second estate.

In this second estate, we walk by faith. A veil of forgetfulness has been placed over our mind, so we don't remember what we did and who we used to be in our pre-mortal existence. Our purpose in this life is to grow and mature in a physical body to prepare us for our final estate.

Mormons do not believe in human depravity. We are not implicated in Adam's fall. We are basically good in our eternal nature, but prone to error in our mortal nature.

The human is a being in conflict, but also a being with infinite potential. This is a view of man. 4, view of God.

In Mormon thought, God has a physical body. According to Doctrine and Covenants, "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's. The Son also, but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of spirit." Whether God the Father is self-existent is unclear.

There was a long procession of gods and fathers leading up to our Heavenly Father. Brigham Young once remarked, "How many gods there are I do not know, but there never was a time when there were not gods and worlds." What is clearer is that the Mormon God is not a higher order or a different species than man. God is a man with a body of flesh and bones like us.

Mormons do not believe in the Trinity. They affirm the unity of three personages, but the unity is a relational unity in purpose and mind, not a unity of essence. The three separate beings of the Godhead are three distinct gods.

5, their view of Christ. Mormons believe Jesus is a redeemer, God, and Savior. He is endless and eternal, the only begotten Son of the Father.

Through Jesus the Heavenly Father has provided a way for people to be like him and to live with him forever. That sounds very familiar. But this familiar language does not mean the same thing to Mormons as it does to Christians.

Jesus was born of the Father just like all spirit children. God is His Father in the same way He is Father to all of us. Whatever immortality or Godhood Jesus possesses, they are inherited attributes and powers.

He does not share the same eternal nature as the Father. Jesus may be divine, but His is a derivative divinity. Mormon theology teaches in the words of Joseph Smith that Jesus Christ is "God the Second, the Redeemer." 6, view of the atonement.

Mormons believe Jesus died for sins and rose again from the dead. The atonement is the central event in history and essential to their theology. And yet Mormons do not have a precise doctrine of the atonement.

They do not emphasize Christ as a wrath-bearing substitute, but emphasize simply that Christ somehow mysteriously remits our sin through His suffering. While the atonement itself is not overly defined, the way in which the atonement is made efficacious is much more carefully delineated. Salvation is available because of the atoning blood of Christ.

But this salvation is only received upon four conditions, faith, repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end by keeping the commandments of God, which include various Mormon rituals. Those are four conditions for receiving the salvation. This is very different from an understanding of justification by faith alone, through grace alone, by the work of Christ alone.

Finally, it should be noted, Mormon theology stresses the suffering in the garden rather than the suffering on the cross. Atonement may have been completed on Golgotha, but it was made efficacious in Gethsemane. In 7, view of salvation.

The goal of Mormon salvation is not about escaping wrath as much as it is about maximizing our growth and ensuring our happiness. Salvation is finding our way back to God the Father and recalling our forgotten first estate as His pre-mortal spirit children. Mormon theology teaches that we cannot receive an eternal reward by our own unaided efforts.

In some respects, salvation is based on what we have earned, but what we earn is by grace. This plays out in Mormon life, may differ from person to person, but they stress that the gift of the Holy Ghost is conditional upon continued obedience. So on the one hand, they might say, "No, we don't believe we're earning it, but yet it is conditioned upon continual obedience." And that effort must be made even if it's made by grace.

Mormons must keep the first principles and ordinances, which consist of the Ten Commandments, tithing, chastity, and the word of wisdom, which prohibits tobacco coffee, tea, alcohol, and illegal narcotics. Temples are also important in Mormon doctrine and practice. Couples must be married in a Mormon temple to have an eternal marriage, and every Mormon must be baptized in one of their authorized temples.

Because of the importance of baptism in the temple, baptisms for the dead are extremely common. Mormons keep detailed genealogical records so that their ancestors can be properly baptized. By one estimate, more than 100 million deceased persons have been baptized by proxy baptism in Mormon temples.

Those who receive this baptism are free in the afterlife to reject or accept what has been done on their behalf. Death in Mormon thinking is seen as another beginning, complete with the opportunities to respond to post-mortem preaching in the world to come. We will live in the spirit world, and at some point our spirit and body will be reunited forever.

There are four divisions in the afterlife, according to the Mormon thought. The Lake of Fire is reserved for the devil, his demons, and those who commit the unpardonable sin. The Telestial Kingdom is where the wicked go.

It is a place of suffering, but not like the Lake of Fire. Most people go to the Telestial Kingdom where they are offered salvation again. The lukewarm, not quite good, not quite evil, go to the terrestrial kingdom when they die.

This kingdom is located on a distant planet in the universe. And then the Celestial Kingdom is for the righteous. For God's people live forever in God's presence, we will live as gods and live with our spouses and continue to procreate.

This is the aim and the end of Mormon's salvation. Conclusion Christians can be thankful for Mormon friends and family members who are good neighbors and share many of the same ethical standards and moral commitments. But Mormonism and Christianity are not the same, far from it.

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