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What's the Most Important Distinction I Can Make between Christianity and the Book of Mormon?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about the most important distinction one can make between Christianity and the Book of Mormon when talking to a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

* When ministering to a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what's the most important distinction I can make between Christianity and the Book of Mormon?

Transcript

#STRask What's the Most Important Distinction I Can Make between Christianity and the Book of Mormon? You're listening to Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast. I'm Amy Hall and Greg Koukl's with me. Hey! Hello, Greg.

We're here to answer your questions that you send on Twitter with the hashtag #STRask. Hello, Greg. Okay, Amy.

This first question comes from Robert Chappelle. When ministering to a Mormon, technically LDS Church, according to the guy I was speaking with, what would you think is the most important nuance that I can make between Christianity and the Book of Mormon? Well, I'm a little confused about the question because it's comparing a book to a religion, Christianity, and Book of Mormon. Something that's important for people to keep in mind is that the LDS Church has actually four books, they believe, are authoritative.

The first one's the Bible, as long as it's properly translated. They always ask that caveat, but of course, I agree with that too. I don't believe it a Bible that's not properly translated.

Second one is the Book of Mormon. Third one is the doctrine of covenants, and the fourth

one is the pearl of great price. Plus, there's other writings too and the declarations of the apostolic hierarchy over the years that have authority as well.

What's interesting to me is that the appeal that is made by Mormon missionaries to encourage people to consider Mormonism is that they pray about the Book of Mormon to see if the Book of Mormon is inspired. And they ask God to give them a feeling in their heart, a witness that the Book of Mormon is from God. But the Book of Mormon is not a theological book.

It's the other books that are theological. It doesn't mean there's not theology in the Book of Mormon, but that's not the book that should be praying about. If they want to know whether Mormonism is true, they should be praying about the other books.

Okay. So let's just say this troubles me that this is the way the emphasis, because when people start reading the Book of Mormon, they don't read anything that controversial if they're been raised in a Christian environment. They're reading about a history, an alleged history of Jesus having visited the American continent and civilizations that were there and what he did to establish LDS Latter-day Saints kind of doctrine, etc.

So this is where this history is in the Book of Mormon talking about the foundation of the Mormon belief system. So it's not theological as the point. And so people start reading this history.

They may be interested in it and feel good about it because there's nothing that's going to offend them theologically that much. Never heard about Jesus coming to America, but after all, why not? And so it's easy, I think, for people to be brought into Mormonism under that guise. Now, there are problems.

So that's the first thing I want people to see, that the Book of Mormon is not the heart of Mormonism. It's the history of some aspects of Mormonism. It isn't the doctrine, the doctrine is critical.

And in the moment, I'm going to toss the ball to you, Amy, because you know more about that. You probably knowing more about the Book of Mormon can understand some of the theological elements, but by and large, it's historical. That's the claim.

Problem is it's not historical. How do we know that? Because there is no reason to believe any of the history in the Book of Mormon. There's not a shred of documented evidence of these vast civilizations that apparently were here in the North American continent before Europeans came here.

And the civilizations were vast and complex. They had horses, they had chariots, according to the record. And yet there's not a city, there's not a pot, there's not a shard, there's not a coin, there's not any archaeological evidence of any kind that anything like this existed.

And if you're going to make historical claims about a place that are theologically significant, be nice if you had some corroboration. But the fact that there's nothing is really good evidence that these civilizations did not exist. Okay.

Secondly, I made a little reference to this, but the document records horses and chariots, but there were no horses in North America. The Spaniards brought the horses. The Native Americans had no horses until the Spaniards brought them.

They also didn't have any wheels. And if you look at some western just see sometimes people pulling or maybe a horse pulling a sled with stuff on it because they had no wheels. That also was not a feature of the cultures of North America until the Europeans came and they brought wheels with them.

So just on the historical issue, there is there is a there's no evidence for these civilizations. And there are things that allegedly were part of those civilizations that are clearly and completely contrary to fact. Ergo, we have no good reason to believe the claim that the Book of Mormon is an accurate account of anything historical happening in North America.

And by the way, if that's the case, it doesn't matter how much of a burning of the bosom that you have, it ain't going to make it true. Yeah, I agree, Greg, that most of their unusual theology is found in other books besides the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon was the first thing written.

And so there's a lot of similarity to Christian things. So I agree that this might be a little bit difficult. In terms of generally between Christianity and Mormonism, the two major differences have to do with the nature of God and the nature of the gospel.

So if you can just remember God and the gospel, these are the two biggest points. And I think if you had to pick one of them, I would probably go with the gospel just because that's how we're saved. And the way that Mormons think they will be exalted to the highest level of heaven is by following very particular laws and what they call the plan of salvation.

So that's a big difference. In fact, just to illustrate, I think I've told this story here before, but they have this book called Gospel Principles. And this book is what they use to teach their in Sunday school classes and things.

And there's a parable in there of a man. It's intended to show us how Jesus, what he's done for us works. And he tells the story of a man who is in great debt and he can't pay it.

So he's in front of the debtor and he's just on his knees begging to be let off from this debt. And a man comes along and this person represents Jesus. And he says, I will take on his debt.

And so the creditor says, okay, so he takes on the debt. And then Jesus is so far so good. So far so good.

But then Jesus turns to the man and he says, now you owe the money to me and I will set the terms and it'll be difficult, but you'll be able to do it. And that's where the whole that's where the difference comes between Christian, the end Mormonism. And in fact, I have that posted on our website.

By the way, how could such a shift be good news? Instead of owing man A, you owe man B. Because he creates a system whereby you can earn it. You could pay it off. Yeah.

So this is, this is the idea that you need to get across to your friend. It's very possible. He doesn't even understand this difference exists because we use so many of the same words that sometimes I think there are things that Mormons think we believe that we don't believe.

So this is the main idea. So I, I went looking, I don't know the book of Mormon well enough to know where particular verses are. So I went to Mormonism research ministry, which is at mrm.org. And they're a great resource and they have a, a post there titled 10 awesome book of Mormon passages to use with Latter-day Saints.

So I found specific ones there. Here's the first one, second Nephi 25 through, well that can't, oh yeah, 25 23. For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children and also our brethren to believe in Christ and to be reconciled to God.

For we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all we can do. So here he had the idea of you have to do all you can do and then you can be saved. Well, we never do all that we can't do.

I don't even know what that means. There's no, there's no safety in that. And by the way, the comparison there is between, with that passage, Ephesians 2, 8, 9, which says, "By grace we have saved to faith that not of yourselves, it's a gift of God." So that's the contrast.

And here's the, the second one, Alma 11, 37. And I say unto you again, that he cannot save them in their sins. For I cannot deny his word and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, how can ye be saved except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore ye cannot be saved in your sins. So in other words, we have to bring ourselves out of our sins before we can be saved. So this is another very different idea.

Yeah, I'm thinking now of Romans chapter 4, where Paul says, "For him who works, it is reckoned to him as, as what is due." You earned it. "But for him who does not work, but believes in a God who justifies the ungodly to him, it's reckoned as righteousness." So

that's Romans 4. That's a contrasting passage to this one in the Book of Mormon. And then finally, here's one from Moroni 10 32, "Yea, come unto Christ and be perfected in him and deny yourselves of all ungodliness.

And if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ." It's just so amazing if grace is specifically the way that's described there, grace isn't grace at all. Grace is what you merit by your effort. I think here are Romans 5 where it says, even I think it's Romans 5, you can correct me on this one, Amy, "Even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, the just for the unjust." And so what a contrast in these passages between the truth and the error of Mormonism and all of these relate to what you said, Amy, is to the gospel, the whole issue of the gospel.

It's very different. And when I think about direct parallel in the wording here, he says, "If you love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you." And then I think of 2 Corinthians 12, 9, and 10, "He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong." And I don't think he's talking here about sinfulness. I think he's just talking about, yeah, I think he's just talking about weakness. So it's slightly different from the Moroni passage.

But the whole idea of our weakness, God's strength, saving us from our weakness, this is an idea that is not really present because you have to perfect yourself before God's grace and his power is effective for you. I'll tell you, the most trans, as they look back at almost 50 years, I mean my 50th year now as a Christian, the most, and what I'm going to say is not profound, but I'm just going to affirm it. The thing that has had the most transformative power in my life is understanding the grace of God.

And I am glad I was raised wrong with Catholic because the grace of God was not communicated in that environment. I left that and not six years later I discovered the grace of God and very early as a Christian I had very good teaching on the grace of God. And I have felt a tremendous sense of safety based on the grace of God ever since as a Christian.

And I've never had to struggle with the sense that I was not safe in Christ. And that has made all the difference to the world because now I can be in a friendship with God based on a familial relationship, accepted in the beloved instead of me trying to always, always earn my way and looking on my shoulder all the time. Maybe I've not earned it enough.

And by the way, if you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength that way that book that verse in the book and Mormon goes, and of course, this

is citing Jesus. I have never had a moment, not a split second of that in my entire life. Who has? I imagine there are some, but Jesus did of the Father, but that's the standard which cannot be kept, which is why Jesus gave, that's clarified what the law required to show the burden of the law, which is why he could say and given a Mormon theology, how can this make sense come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest? How could that make any sense? Certainly in a legal fashion in terms of the law, and I think that's what Jesus was speaking to principally.

He gives us rest a lot of ways, but he was speaking largely to the burden of the law that people were under that they could not keep. And he's giving rest. That's the rest of the Lord that the writer of Hebrews talks about entering into his rest by faith.

And I think it's easy for us to take this for granted because we're used to hearing about grace, but just imagine what it would be like to live under a system where you have to perfect yourself and you have to follow all these laws. The pressure they must be under that, hopefully this should give you some sympathy and desire to share with them the truth about grace. There's a book I really like about talking to Mormons, and it's called Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons and by Mark Carver.

And the approach he takes is he helps you to understand how to put the weight of their own law on them just as Jesus did with helping them understand the depth of the law and the spirit of the law and how far they fell from it. So what he recommends in this book is to help them to understand the weight of their own law so they realize the need for grace. It occurred to me too when you do that.

This is another little strategy I've used that has a lot of application. Here's one of them is when you take their demands and put it on them and ask them how they've done regarding those demands. Well, I'm trying.

Well, I'm working at it. Then ask this question. What does the word gospel mean? It's good news, right? What you just described to me, what you're laboring under, what you're trying to keep up with, is that good news or bad news? Of course, it's bad news.

And it's no different from the Mosaic Law. So how could this be new? We're just going to give you a new set of laws. How is that different? They already had a set of laws.

Paul's whole point is that the law could not give you the power to overcome your sin. And that's the reason why Jesus came. That's what we learn from reading the whole Bible.

So what sense does it make that he would have to come in and give a whole new set of laws? That's not anything new. That's not news at all. So those are the gospel things.

Now, there are some really interesting things that have to do with God in the Book of Mormon. And that is the idea now in Mormonism is that God was once a man as we are,

and he became a God by following his own plan of salvation. And he was perfected.

And some say that he sent, some say that he didn't send, but regardless, he still was perfected and became a God because he was born a man like we are. But back at the beginning of all of this, that idea had not been developed. So what you find in the Book of Mormon when it comes to... The beginning of all of... Mormonism.

Okay. At the beginning of Mormonism, the man becomes God wasn't developed well. Okay.

That came later. It came later. So what you find in the Book of Mormon is you actually find ideas that contradict Mormonism.

So this might be... This isn't... Well, you'll see in a second, but these actually contradict Mormonism. So this might be another way to go. The first one is Mormon 9-9.

For we... For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in Him, there is no variableness, neither shadow of changing. Both of those from the New Testament Hebrews and also James. So they're citing... They're citing that verse saying that God never changes, but the whole idea is this progression.

Not only do we progress from man to God, but then even the gods are progressing. So there are gods who are ahead of us and the head of them and on and on for eternity. All right.

The second one is Moroni 8-18. For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being, but He is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity. Now, I don't think I've ever asked a Mormon personally about that verse.

So that might be a verse you'll ask Him. Is God unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity? This sounds more like Christianity than Mormonism. So both of these verses sound more like Christianity than Mormonism, so they might be good ones to bring up.

And here's another one, Alma 11-26 through 29. And these are what I'm said unto Him. They'll say us there is a true and living God.

And Amulek said, "Yes, or yay, there is a true and living God." Now, Z's Rome said, "Is there more than one God?" And he answered, "No." Now, this is a problem not just with the gods who came before, but this is a problem with the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father who are all gods in the Mormon view are separate gods. So again, here's another verse where you could ask, "Look, this actually sounds more like Christianity than Mormonism." And then finally, here's one from, oh, this is an interesting one, Ether 3.14, "Behold, I am He who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ.

I am the Father and the Son. In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name, and they shall become my sons and daughters." Now, this verse doesn't sound like Mormonism or Christianity, because this sounds like modalism. So again, here's another verse where you can say, "I don't know how you square this with my word." Jesus is the Father and the Son.

There's no distinction between the persons, right? Right. And we were talking about modalism in a prior show. A couple of episodes ago, I think.

Actually, it's about an hour ago for us. That's why it's fresh on your mind. So hopefully, Robert, those will give you some ideas of verses you can look up and say either they are opposite of Christianity or they're closer to Christianity or they're neither like Christianity nor like Mormonism.

And that might give you some ideas. But I would also recommend that you ask him more about the theology in general, because a lot of it doesn't come from the book of Mormon. But if you're looking specifically for Book of Mormon, those are places to start.

There you go. What's the source again? Can you repeat the website? So it's Mormonism Research Ministry, M-R-M.org. And the post is 10 awesome Book of Mormon passages to use with Latter-day Saints. They're great guys.

In fact, Eric Johnson was on our podcast a couple months ago. Robbie Lassua interviewed him about his new book. So you can go to our website at str.org and you can listen to that also.

All right. Thank you for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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