

Pastors' Perspective!

Supporting Christian Witness to Mormons

Because "some men...are...wanting to change the Gospel of Christ." Galatians 1:7

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UNDERSTANDING MORMON RELIGION

DEATH AND JUDGMENT, HEAVEN AND HELL IN MORMON RELIGION

1. MORMONISM : RESPOND OR IGNORE?

2. HEAVEN AT ITS BEST : GODS & FAMILIES FOREVER.

3. BACKUP PLAN : OTHER HEAVENS.

1. Mormon religion relates only remotely to Christian faith. The subtle blend of sights and sounds familiar to Christians with doctrines from Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors can be tempting and deceiving.

What is a useful Christian response? Acceptance? Ignorance? Lethargy? Of course not!

Christians can boldly affirm well-established biblical truths and demonstrate confident, saving faith in Christ. Mormons need to hear the truth, and it may be best presented by Christians who understand Mormon religion.

But here's the problem: Mormons imagine themselves to be misunderstood and unfairly criticized. Often they may deny the teachings of their own church or simply dismiss your beliefs: "Oh, we believe that, too."

The two following items are accurate, modern-day teachings of the Mormon church. They are not resurrected from out-of-date Mormon materials or lifted from anti-Mormon literature. This is what the Mormon church teaches.

Here's judgment, heaven, and hell in the complex, self-serving, unbiblical theology of Mormonism. Tell them!

2. In the end Mormons aspire to "become gods," live forever with their own families, and "be able to have spirit children [who] will have the same relationship to them as we do to our Heavenly Father." [Words quoted here and following are from the Mormon church's teacher's manual, *Gospel Principles*, and other current church materials.]

The Mormon message: Families can be together forever. It is a powerful missionary tool. The church's latest guide for its missionaries (*Preach My Gospel*, 2004) reminds them early on: "It is possible . . . for families to be united eternally." Intrusive requirements for this "exaltation" are numerous, imprecise, confusing, and subjective. They are easily overlooked by those attracted by the idea of a personal, eternal family, and missionaries may avoid some details. Some converts learn only after baptism.

The Mormon church has listed things people can do after they believe in Christ to improve their chances to "become gods," "exalted," and "forever families." They must be baptized and confirmed as Mormons, and "receive the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost." Two other required ordinances are performed only in Mormon temples: "endowment" and marriage "for time and eternity."

Even then, each person must "endure to the end," overcome the world by faith,

and obey commandments. Seventeen commands published in *Gospel Principles* include obedience to Mormon prophets; payment of tithes and offerings to the church; attendance at church meetings; genealogy or "family history" research and temple rituals to "save the dead" ("search out our kindred dead and perform saving ordinances of the gospel for them"); keeping the Sabbath holy; and abstinence from coffee, tea, and other substances. Any Mormon can attest that in real life their church expects even more.

And the church keeps score.

3. At a Final Judgment people will be "rewarded according to our works and our desires" (*Preach My Gospel*).

Three panels of judges under Christ's supervision will review records kept on earth by the Mormon church, and in heaven. Church records include their "revelations [and] temple records [and] those things the Lord has commanded us to keep." Records may be updated after death if spirits choose to improve as they wait in "a [temporary] state of happiness or misery": "paradise" (Mormons) or "hell" (all others). Spirits may convert and move from hell to paradise. From *Gospel Principles*: After resurrection—

- "[T]he First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles [of the Mormon church] will...judge us."

- "The Twelve who were with [Christ] in his ministry will judge the twelve tribes of Israel."

- Twelve apostles Mormons think Christ appointed on the prehistoric "American continent" will judge ancient Americans known to Mormons as Nephites and Lamanites.

Judges will assign people to one of three kingdoms of glory, or a lesser, fourth kingdom:

- The "**telestial kingdom**"—for those who reject the gospel, including "liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers." This is glory, not hell. The Holy Ghost will visit these people.
- The more glorious "**terrestrial kingdom**"—for those who accepted the Mormon message only after death, or accepted it on earth "but then were not valiant." They will not live as "forever families," but Jesus will visit them.
- The "**celestial kingdom**"—for faithful Mormons. They "will live with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ." Any who may have met all requirements for exaltation may live with their families forever and "become gods."
- Few will be assigned to "outer darkness" or "**the kingdom of Satan**."

BOTTOM LINE

When Christians see the complexities beyond the everyday Mormon message they can help Mormons, delivering biblical good news—the simplicity of true, saving Christian faith.

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