

# A Case Study - Mormonism

## The Power of the Scripture

Against the Heathen - Athanasius

The knowledge of our religion and of the truth of things is independently manifest rather than in need of human teachers, for almost day by day it asserts itself by facts, and manifests itself brighter than the sun by the doctrine of Christ. <sup>2</sup> Still, as you nevertheless desire to hear about it, Macarius, come let us as we may be able set forth a few points of the faith of Christ: able though you are to find it out from the divine oracles, but yet generously desiring to hear from others as well. <sup>3</sup> For although the sacred and inspired Scriptures are sufficient to declare the truth — while there are other works of our blessed teachers compiled for this purpose, if he meet with which a man will gain some knowledge of the interpretation of the Scriptures, and be able to learn what he wishes to know — still, as we have not at present in our hands the compositions of our teachers, we must communicate in writing to you what we learned from them — the faith, namely, of Christ the Saviour; lest any should hold cheap the doctrine taught among us, or think faith in Christ unreasonable.

From the starting lines of "Against the Heathen", by Athanasius, his declaration at first is startling. The scripture, he says, is sufficient to teach the truth of the faith in Christ as our Saviour.

However, we must approach the scripture with an open, humble and teachable heart. The Holy Spirit will then reveal the truth to us. This does not preclude reading and listening to interpretations, sermons and other teachings. However, the point which I'd like to stress is the importance of your own commitment to the word of God. To add to this, we must recognize how our minds and our knowledge might be limited and we should have the desire to cross-reference our understanding with the established teachings of the Church across the centuries. We must also guard against ideas which might superficially appeal to us due to a specific weakness we might have. That's why we have the members of the Church who can be more knowledgeable and can help us research topics and increase our understanding.

As a side note, that's why I think the willingness to listen and discuss in open mindedness about various topics is extremely important. It makes people feel at ease to approach others with their questions, without the feeling of being judged.

## Knowledge with Pride

1 Corinthians 8

<sup>8</sup> Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge <sup>[a]</sup>puffs up, but love <sup>[b]</sup>edifies. <sup>2</sup> And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

<sup>4</sup> Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), <sup>6</sup> yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom *we live*.

<sup>7</sup> However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

<sup>9</sup> But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a <sup>[c]</sup>stumbling block to those who are weak. <sup>10</sup> For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? <sup>11</sup> And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? <sup>12</sup> But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Although my point is about knowledge and Pride, I thought the entire chapter is important as it emphasizes the need to love our brother and not offend them, even if it's due to their own weakness.

Back to the point, Knowledge without humility only leads to error. We have seen that play out over the centuries many times. When someone is prideful, he looks down on everyone and he becomes unteachable. They can no longer grow, and if they don't grow then they wither.

Pride leads to hidden sins. Pride forces a person to put on a facade and never admit his mistake. It pushes a person farther from God. God is perfect and the closer you come to him the more we realize how imperfect and sinful we really are. This is not acceptable to pride and therefore it pushes us away from God.

## Half Truths

The most deceiving lies are half truths.

If a person wants to change your opinion about a friend, he will not tell you an explicit lie about him. He will let a small untruth slip in, in a devious manner, to turn you against him. For example, he's not going to say: Your friend said you're ugly. He might say: Your friends and I were speaking a lot, and your dress came up. He said you wasted a lot of money on it. Your friend might have mentioned you bought a dress, but the devious twist is adding "wasted a lot of money" bit. This little fib turns you against your friend, because you feel he's talking bad about you behind your back. Making you look like a wasteful individual. And from their, things snow ball.

## Discernment

Hebrews 4:11-13

<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must* give account.

Hebrews 5:12-14

<sup>12</sup> For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the <sup>[b]</sup>oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. <sup>14</sup> But solid food belongs to those who are <sup>[c]</sup>of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of <sup>[d]</sup>use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

It is clear then how important discernment is. It is also clear that there is an expectation from us to be "of full age". And being of full age must come by "reason of use", IE exercise.

We can not rely on others to do the work for us, but we must endeavour to learn and to search and to convince ourselves. This is the only way our discernment can be used.

We have a cautionary tale of King Joash and the Priest Jehoiada. Joash relied so completely on Jehoiada that he never matured. And when Jehoiada died, Joash strayed away from God and did many evil things.

It is not enough to rely on others, but one must grow himself or herself.

## What does this have to do with Mormons?

First I'd like to highlight an important point. Life is complicated. There is a lot of nuance and details, which at a high level might not be important, but if you wish to become an expert, you need to get familiar with the details.

Second, when we talk about different beliefs, at a high level we must differentiate between groups which are Christians, but have differences with us, and non-Christians.

Mormons fall in the latter category. Like many other cults, they have a bunch of half truths:

### Priesthood

In the [Latter Day Saint movement](#), **priesthood** is the power and authority of God given to man, including the authority to perform [ordinances](#) and to act as a leader in the church. A group of priesthood holders is referred to as a [quorum](#).

Priesthood denotes elements of both power and authority. The priesthood includes the power [Jesus](#) gave his [apostles](#) to perform miracles such as the casting out of devils and the healing of sick ([Luke 9:1](#)). Latter Day Saints believe that the [Biblical](#) miracles performed by [prophets](#) and apostles were performed by the power of priesthood, including the miracles of [Jesus](#), who holds all of the keys of the priesthood. The priesthood is formally known as the "Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God", but to avoid the too frequent use of the name of deity, the priesthood is referred to as the Melchizedek priesthood ([Melchizedek](#) being the high priest to whom [Abraham](#) paid tithes).

### Ordinances

In the [Latter Day Saint movement](#), the term **ordinance** is used to refer to [sacred rites](#) and [ceremonies](#) that have spiritual and symbolic meanings and act as a means of conveying [divine grace](#). Ordinances are physical acts which signify or symbolize an underlying spiritual act; for some ordinances, the spiritual act is the finalization of a [covenant](#) between the ordinance recipient and [God](#).

Ordinances are usually performed by the authority of the [LDS priesthood](#) and in the name of [Jesus Christ](#). The use of the term "ordinance" in LDS parlance is distinct from the use of the term in other branches of [Christian tradition](#), where "ordinance (Christian)" is often used to imply that the act is merely symbolic and does not convey grace. LDS use of the term "ordinance" carries the same meaning as the term "sacrament" as used by other [Christian denominations](#).<sup>[1]</sup> [Community of Christ-derived](#) denominations of the Latter Day Saint movement also tend to refer to "sacraments" rather than "ordinances".

### Baptism

Much of the Latter Day Saint theology of baptism was established during the early [Latter Day Saint movement](#) founded by [Joseph Smith](#). Baptism must be by immersion and is for the remission of [sins](#) (meaning that through baptism, past sins are forgiven), and occurs after one has shown faith and repentance.

### Confirmation

In the [Latter Day Saint movement](#), **Confirmation** (also known as the [Gift of the Holy Ghost](#) or the [Baptism of Fire and of the Holy Ghost](#)), is an [ordinance](#) essential for [salvation](#). It involves the [laying on of hands](#) and is performed after [baptism](#). Through confirmation, the initiate becomes an official member of the church and receives the gift of the [Holy Ghost](#).

### Lord's Supper

Members of the [Latter-day Saint movement](#) often use the word "ordinance" in the place of the word "sacrament", but the actual theology is sacramental in nature.<sup>[72]</sup> Latter-day Saint ordinances are understood as conferring an invisible form of grace of a saving nature and are required for [salvation](#) and [exaltation](#). Latter-day Saints often use the word "sacrament" to refer specifically to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, also known as the [Lord's Supper](#), in which participants eat bread and drink wine (or water, since the late 1800s) as tokens of the flesh and blood of Christ.<sup>[73]</sup> In Latter-day Saint congregations, the sacrament is normally provided every Sunday as part of the [sacrament meeting](#) and, like other Latter-day Saint ordinances such as baptism and confirmation, is considered an essential and sacred rite.

## Notes

At a superficial level, what you read above might seem very, very close to what the Orthodox churches believe in. However, when you start looking at Mormon theology, you start seeing significant departures from established Christian cannon. Examine the table below for examples of stark differences.

## Theology

Topic	Christian	Mormon
GOD	There is only one God. ( <a href="#">Isaiah 43:11</a> ; <a href="#">4:6, 8</a> ; <a href="#">45:5</a> ).	"And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light: and there was light." (Book of Abraham 4:3).
	God has always been God. ( <a href="#">Psalm 90:2</a> ; <a href="#">Isaiah 57:15</a> ).	"God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!!! . . . We have imagined that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea and take away the veil, so that you may see," ( <i>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</i> , p. 345).
	God is a spirit without flesh and bones. ( <a href="#">John 4:24</a> ; <a href="#">Luke 24:39</a> ).	"The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's," (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22; Compare with Alma 18:26-27; 22:9-10). "Therefore we know that both the Father and the Son are in form and stature perfect men; each of them possesses a tangible body . . . of flesh and bones," ( <i>Articles of Faith</i> , by James Talmage, p. 38).
TRINITY	The Trinity is the doctrine that there is only one God in all the universe and that He exists in three eternal, simultaneous persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.	The trinity is three separate Gods: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. "That these three are separate individuals, physically distinct from each other, is demonstrated by the accepted records of divine dealings with man," ( <i>Articles of Faith</i> , by James Talmage, p. 35, 1984).
JESUS	Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. ( <a href="#">Isaiah 7:14</a> ; <a href="#">Matt. 1:23</a> ).	"The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood—was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers," ( <i>Journal of Discourses</i> , vol. 8, p. 115). "Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers" ( <i>Mormon Doctrine</i> , by Bruce McConkie, p. 547).
	Jesus is the eternal Son. He is the second person of the Trinity. He has two natures. He is God in flesh and man ( <a href="#">John 1:1, 14</a> ; <a href="#">Col. 2:9</a> ) and the creator of all things ( <a href="#">Col. 1:15-17</a> ).	Jesus is the literal spirit-brother of Lucifer, a creation ( <i>Gospel Through the Ages</i> , p. 15).
THE HOLY SPIRIT	The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is not a force. He is a person. ( <a href="#">Acts 5:3-4</a> ; <a href="#">13:2</a> )	Mormonism distinguishes between the Holy Spirit (God's presence via an essence) and the Holy Ghost (the third god in the Mormon doctrine of the trinity). "He [the Holy Ghost] is a being endowed with the attributes and powers of Deity, and not a mere force, or essence," ( <i>Articles of Faith</i> , by James Talmage, p. 144).
SALVATION	Salvation is the forgiveness of sin and deliverance of the sinner from damnation. It is a free gift received by God's grace ( <a href="#">Eph. 2:8</a> ; <a href="#">Rom. 6:23</a> ) and cannot be earned. ( <a href="#">Rom. 11:6</a> ).	Salvation has a double meaning in Mormonism: universal resurrection and . . . "The first effect [of the atonement] is to secure to all mankind alike, exemption from the penalty of the fall, thus providing a plan of <i>General Salvation</i> . The second effect is to open a way for <i>Individual Salvation</i> whereby mankind may secure remission of personal sins," ( <i>Articles of Faith</i> , by James Talmage, p. 78-79).

	Salvation (forgiveness of sins) is not by works. (Eph . 2:8; Rom. 4:5; Gal. 2:21).	"As these sins are the result of individual acts it is just that forgiveness for them should be conditioned on individual compliance with prescribed requirements – 'obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel,'" (Articles of Faith, p. 79). (Although this sounds like what the Coptic Orthodox Church says, we must distinguish between the idea of "earning" Salvation through good works, and the idea of "putting on Christ" and "putting off the Old man". By "Putting on Christ", we are in effect living according to what he has called us to. So the good works is not to "earn" Salvation, but is a reflection of the "New Man" given to us through Christ's Salvation. As St. James said, "show me your faith without you works and I'll show you my faith by my works". And in another place. "Faith without works is dead". Therefore, living faith by its nature must bring forth good works.)
<b>BIBLE</b>	The inspired inerrant word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). It is authoritative in all subjects it addresses.	"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly..." (8th Article of Faith of the Mormon Church).

## Conclusion

As you can see, without discernment, and if we look at a topic superficially, it's easy to be deceived. Many of the words they use is very similar to those of Traditional Christianity. However, once you start delving deeper into the theology Mormonism espouses, you can see it strays far away from our traditional theology. In fact, much of what they say does not have any historical or biblical basis. In fact it started in the 1820/1830s with a man called Joseph Smith, who claimed to have prayed to God for a revelation and God appeared to him and gave him the Mormon revelation.

However, if you spend sometime studying Mormon history in more details, you'll find out how their theology evolved over Joseph Smith's life span. As an example, at the beginning he believed in the Trinity, but later, he said that the trinity are actually different physical beings. He then went on to say that God was not always God, but was a normal being who was perfected and entered into divinity.

Of original sin, he praises it and says it was necessary for the perfection of the human race.

As you go on in your research, you see how sin becomes good instead of bad; becomes necessary for Salvation and becoming Gods ourselves. Therefore the lethal nature of sin is ignored.

You see how half truths can confuse the gullible and lead them down an undesired road.

And just to tie in the points together:

- Scripture, the inspired word of God, has the power to reveal the truth to you as long as you approach it with a humble spirit.
- When you acquire knowledge be clear with yourself, that this knowledge should be for the edification of the Body of Christ (IE the church). It is not to distinguish yourself above the others. Beware of pride.
- Be ware of half truths. A statement which from the outside might look truthful, even familiar, but it's meant to conceal a deception
- The only way to recognize half truths in our spiritual life, is to learn discernment. And discernment only comes from dwelling on the word of God. And by applying the Word of God in our lives on a daily basis.
- This brings up to our Case Study on Mormonism
  - How scripture is twisted
  - How tradition is used to cover a flawed theology
  - And how we need to be intimately familiar with the Word of God in order to recognize these flaws.

## Balance

It is important to look at everything on a case by case basis. It is usually easy to generalize and say things like Such and Such denomination is all wrong; they don't know anything. This is not a good approach to anything. You need to always consider the details. You need to study and understand, rather than pass broad judgment. This is not a mandatory exercise. You might not be interested in learning in depth about specific differences between religions or denomination and that's fair enough. But make sure to be careful in passing judgment without understanding the details (or in your zeal to defend your belief). If you want to get into a comparison between denomination, you must be willing to delve and understand the details for yourself, and not rely on cliches propagated over generations. You have to learn to build your own discernment.