

Study on Cults Lesson 2: Mormonism

As we begin our journey of examining various cults within our modern culture, it is important to note that so much of what we discuss will be quite consistent. While there are undeniably various heresies in the world, it is equally true that there is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). We will see that certain, core, doctrines of Christianity are those that are constantly under attack and so I will attempt to point out those issues. My hope is that you will see the places Satan routinely targets and study those issues further so that you are well equipped to stand against his devices.

1. A brief history of Mormonism

- a. Mormonism was founded by one man, Joseph Smith
- b. Smith grew up in the state of New York and was well known for his mystical and bizarre mannerisms as well as his unorthodox practices and beliefs, even prior to his founding of Mormonism
- c. Martin writes, “Smith was a mystic, a man who spent most of his time digging for imaginary buried treasure... besides this failing he sometimes attempted to mint his own money, which at least once brought him into decided conflict with the local constabulary.”
 - i. The point, I suppose, is that Joseph would not be the fella the citizens would look to for biblical, theological advice or direction in his hometown!
- d. The beginning of the Mormon religion, according to Smith, can be traced to a vision Smith had while praying in the wilderness
 - i. According to the Pearl of Great Price (Smith’s book recording Mormon history, amongst other things), heavenly beings appeared to Joseph announcing that a true restoration of Christianity was needed and that he was chosen by God to pioneer this work of renewal!
 - ii. Several years later, Smith claims to have unearthed golden plates from heaven (as he once again was busy digging for treasure) with “reformed Egyptian” hieroglyphics inscribed on them. Using miraculous “spectacles” (the “Urim and Thummim” provided by the angel Moroni) Smith was able to translate this revelation into English. The supposed revelation is now known as the book of Mormon
- e. There are many twists and turns in the Mormon story, including a fascinating tale of Smith accruing a following and eventually leading the group from the New England area to Utah but that is probably better reserved for personal research
- f. The larger point is that Mormonism is a cult because it is united around one man’s extrabiblical teaching and revelation which works to “reform” and in many ways deny the core assertions of biblical Christianity

2. Foundational discrepancies between Mormonism and biblical Christianity

- a. In beginning this section of study, I want to try to be as clear as possible in saying that this is nowhere near an exhaustive list of issues with Mormon theology

- b. Instead, I have simply attempted to locate and discuss a few of the most pressing and most damning doctrines held by the church

- c. First, the doctrine of God
 - i. Mormonism is built on the premise that God was not always Divine, instead the belief is that God ascended to His position of Preeminence
 - 1. Here is an excerpt from one of Smith's "sermons" delivered in August of 1844, "I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined that God was God from all eternity... Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hat the Son power; to do what? Why what the Father did, that answer is obvious... here then is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves; to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to anther, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power."
 - 2. This doctrine has been codified in a pithy saying that is still prevalent in Mormon theology: "As man is, God once was, as God is, man may become."
 - ii. This doctrine denies fundamentally important doctrines like:
 - 1. The eternality of the Father and the Son (Psalm 90:2; John 1:1)
 - 2. The immutability of God, this is the doctrine that God does not and indeed cannot change (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17)
 - 3. The Divinity of Jesus Christ (John 8:56-59)

- d. Second, the doctrine of salvation (soteriology)
 - i. It also communicates a works based plan of salvation
 - 1. You see, if God started out as man and became God then we must agree that it is possible for man to ascend to Divine heights.
 - 2. The fundamental message of Mormonism is that man can save himself!
 - 3. We don't need God for salvation, we may need God as a template or example to us of how to walk in the same path, but the assumption is that we have all the power we need to ascend to God
 - 4. The Bible teaches us that we are helpless and hopeless without God (Romans 5:6)
 - 5. Furthermore, the Scriptures tell us that salvation has been accomplished for us in Christ (Acts 2:38; John 19:30)
 - a. John 19:30, in particular, presents a true problem for Mormonism
 - b. If Jesus said "it is finished", what did He mean?

- c. Biblical Christianity clearly asserts that He meant that the necessary sacrifice to atone for the sins of all men, thereby offering salvation to the world, was finished
 - d. But in Mormon thought, there can be no way that Jesus finished what I must attain!
 - 6. Finally, we know that salvation is through One Savior, Christ alone (Acts 4:12; John 14:6)
- e. Third, the doctrine of the depravity of man
 - i. Mormonism is like all other false religions in that it asserts that man is innately capable of earning salvation but this denies the biblical teaching that man's soul is depraved
 - ii. Biblical Christianity teaches that we must have our hearts "regenerated" meaning they must be born again if we are to be saved and this regeneration is not self-willed, it is the product of God's grace alone
 - 1. This is because we are "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1)
 - 2. Our souls are so wicked that we would not seek after God, nor His path in any respect (Romans 3:10-12)
 - 3. Like Ezekiel foreshadowed, the souls of those who God restores constitute nothing but dry bones until the gracious power of our God breathes new life and vitality into our decaying skeletons (Ezekiel 37:1-14)
 - 4. Furthermore, the Bible teaches us that our sin requires payment (Romans 6:23)
 - iii. All of this teaches us that God must intervene in our salvation
 - 1. We need Him for life, we need Him for atonement, we need Him for the renewal of heart that would even motivate us to seek Him, and we need Him for victory over death!
 - iv. Mormons would have us believe that we just need a bit of direction, the Gospel says you need a miraculous resurrection!