

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINITIONS IN DEALING WITH MORMONS

By Lloyd Larkin

Theology of the Latter-Day Saints is permeated with Bible vocabulary. However, most of these familiar-sounding terms have been redefined according to their usage in Mormon *scripture*. Hence, it is entirely possible to talk with Mormons concerning salvation and the gospel without any real communication taking place.

All Mormons believe in eternal life and often claim to embrace salvation by grace. Also, practicing Mormons quickly agree that we must accept the gospel. Furthermore, many Mormons testify that they have indeed received Christ as Savior. LDS theology even affirms the necessity of being born again. In spite of all this, Mormons are lost. Why? The answer lies in the matter of definitions. When ministering to Mormons, we must be very careful to use Bible definitions for Bible terms. Be certain to give book, chapter, and verse!

Let us use the examples just mentioned to illustrate what we mean.

ETERNAL LIFE

Eternal life, as viewed by Mormons, includes the opportunity for eternal progression. That is, through faithful performance of the principles and ordinances of the LDS *gospel*, Mormon men anticipate becoming gods. Essential to this attainment is marriage for time and eternity, a ceremony performed only in Mormon temples. This celestial marriage assures the LDS couple of endless powers of procreation, very necessary to their teaching that such offspring will populate the world over which the Mormon husband-become-a-god will rule. This is the doctrinal basis for the strong emphasis LDS people place on family solidarity.

Clearly, Mormons have not merely misunderstood *how* to receive eternal life. They have redefined *what* eternal life is. Romans 6:23 maintains Biblical clarity by showing eternal life to be the state of deliverance from eternal death. Eternal life, therefore, is joyous life in the presence of God. While creatures cannot become gods (Isaiah 43:10; 14:12-15; Genesis 3:5) and the family unit is solely an earthly institution (Matthew 22:30; Romans 7:1-2), each individual family member can be assured of a glorious eternity with loved ones through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:30-34).

SALVATION BY GRACE

But do Mormons really believe in salvation by grace? They do, if we grant to them their contention that salvation is usually to be equated with physical resurrection from the dead. But the Bible simply does not use salvation that way. Biblical contexts present salvation as a package, including such gifts as deliverance from spiritual death (Ephesians 2:5), the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and a place with God in glory (Luke 7:47-50; John 3:15-18; 14:6).

Mormons do not subscribe to the Bible doctrine that forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the presence of God are solely by grace. These, the LDS Church teaches, are available only upon compliance to certain commandments. Therefore, when a Mormon seems to agree with salvation by grace, be sure to understand what he means and be ready with the Bible alternative.

THE GOSPEL

When Mormons say that they accept the gospel, it is imperative to challenge the LDS concept that the gospel is anything taught by Mormonism. The Bible alternative to this is found in 1st Corinthians 15:1-4 and Galatians 1:6-9.

RECEIVING CHRIST

Similarly, even though Mormons may profess to have received Christ as Savior, we must ask: What kind of Christ have you accepted, and exactly what do you trust Him to do for you? To believe in a Christ who has evolved into deity is to trust a false Christ. To ascribe the potential of sin to the Savior is to manufacture an extra-biblical Savior. These and other equally grave errors are attached to LDS Christology.

When one accepts a false Christ, he has bent the knee to a false god just as surely as the idol worshipper in the most remote areas of foreign missions. But ironically, Mormons do not even trust the god(s) to whom they pledge their allegiance. The Mormon Christ has only presented certain opportunities by which exaltation may be merited. Mormons are not in simplicity trusting Christ freely to give them all things (Romans 8:32).

THE NEW BIRTH

What, then, do Mormons actually have in mind when they agree to the necessity of the new birth? Like some other groups, Mormons view the new birth synonymously with water baptism (by immersion). Yet, the Bible does not support such an interpretation. John 3:3-16, the great Bible exposition on the new birth, does not so much as mention baptism, either in the original Greek or in our English translation. Many stumble over John 3:5 which tells us that we must be born of water and of the Spirit in order to enter the Kingdom of God. How sad it is to witness millions of souls rejecting the life-giving Word, thinking that baptism is the new birth. Such are the Mormons; they desperately need the Word of truth.

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