

WHAT WOULD
JESUS
SAY TODAY

?

TO THE
LATTER-DAY
SAINTS

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What Would Jesus Say to the Latter-Day Saints?

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WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY TODAY
TO THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS
?

It is the will of God that his children should be concerned about "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) in their dealings with others. As an ordained Lutheran pastor since 1970, my primary calling in life has been to lead people into a better knowledge and a greater acceptance of God's truth as it is revealed to all people in the Bible.

As the years passed, I occasionally had the opportunity to visit with young men serving as missionaries for the Latter-day Saints - the Mormons. Eventually I realized that:

1. I didn't know as much about the LDS as I needed to know to talk with them.
2. The LDS missionaries didn't know much LDS history or doctrine, either, and couldn't tell me everything that I needed to know.
3. Two-hour visits were too short a time to even begin to explain basic truths of the Bible to people who had little familiarity with the Christian teachings of the Bible.

So I did my homework, and after two or three years I felt that I was ready to "speak the truth in love" to the Latter-day Saints. I gathered everything that I had learned about the history, doctrine and practice of the LDS into a 61-page paper. This paper also had in it God's plan of salvation as the Bible presents it, showing where LDS doctrines stand in opposition to Bible truth.

Now I had something to give to the LDS missionaries who came to my door. They could take it home, study it, and then come back if they wished to discuss the issues involved.

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I also made my paper available to other people who wanted to share it with Mormon relatives or friends for whom they were concerned.

Eventually I received a letter from the LDS zone leader in charge of the missionaries assigned to the area in which I lived. In the last of five paragraphs he wrote:

"I solemnly declare to you this day that either you cease your 'unauthorized' literary attacks on the church, or you will stand before the Judgement bar of the Almighty God with no advocate for redemption."

The letter was signed by the zone leader and by three of the missionaries then serving under him "in accordance with 2 Cor. 13:1-2." There the Apostle Paul says: "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

This warning was of no consequence as far as I was concerned. As a Christian, I believe in the undeserved forgiveness promised by God to every sinner by grace, received by faith in his Son's perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. I know that I do have "an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

But my concern is the lack of Bible knowledge on the part of the LDS - people who claim to be the best teachers of God's truth in the world. This ignorance of the Bible is demonstrated in the fourth paragraph of the letter that I received:

"I know now, that if a man simply had more intellect than an ant or the understanding of a clod of mirey clay in a primordial (sic) swamp, he could see through your 'antiChrist' like be-

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haviors. Paul spoke of such behavior: Acts 9:5. Since Christ nor the Apostles ever tore down other churches, I would venture to say that you are not serving them nor following very closely their example."

Mark that last sentence: "Since Christ nor the Apostles ever tore down other churches ..." This statement is simply contrary to fact, contrary to everything that Jesus ever said about the established religious leaders of his day, and contrary to the warnings of Jesus and his apostles against the religious errors of their day. Read the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, and you will find that this is true.

How could our Lord Jesus, who tells us: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), not warn against that which is not true and ways that lead to eternal death instead of eternal life? In the New Testament we find Jesus condemning the false doctrine and wrong practice of the lawyers, scribes and Pharisees who represented the established church of the day in Palestine.

The lawyers were men trained in the law, especially the law of Moses. The great concern in their lives is seen in the question that a certain lawyer asked Jesus: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). The lawyers, referred to also as scribes, were the guardians of Jewish truth from the time of Ezra (Ezra 7:6) after a Jewish remnant returned from the Babylonian captivity. The captivity did what God wanted it to do for the Jews; after it they took great pains to avoid idolatry. But in the last centuries before the birth of Christ

the lawyers, or scribes, and with them the Pharisees, began to reason that since God gave them his commandments, the law, that then he must have meant for them to save themselves by their faithfulness in obeying God's law. This is why the lawyer asked Jesus: "...What shall I do...?" (Luke 10:25).

The following eight questions and conclusions are a Christian's answer to our general theme: "What would Jesus say today to the Latter-day Saints?" Please give them your close attention. If, in every case, the religion of Mormonism finds itself standing on the side of the lawyers, scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus condemned, then can Mormonism still correctly claim to be "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints"?

I. ARE PEOPLE SAVED BY OBEYING LAWS AND ORDINANCES?

Jesus condemned the self-righteousness of the lawyers (Luke 11:45-52), telling them (v. 52): "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." (See Matthew 23:13.)

God didn't give us his law so that we might try to save ourselves by keeping it. God intends that the law should be the means by which we might recognize that because of our sins of thought, word and deed we are lost and condemned sinners deserving nothing but death and eternal damnation. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Study also Genesis 8:21, Leviticus 19:2, Deuteronomy 27:26, Psalm

51:5, Isaiah 57:21, 64:6, Matthew 10:28, Romans 3:23, 5:12, 6:23, 7:7,18, 8:7-8, Galatians 3:19, Ephesians 2:3, 1 Timothy 1:9, James 2:10, 1 John 1:8.

But what do we hear from the Utah LDS? At their 152nd semiannual General Conference in October, 1982, Gordon Hinkley said:

"...gladness and peace and healing come in walking in obedience to the commandments of God as set forth in the teachings of the church."

David B. Haight, a member of the council of the twelve apostles, said:

"... How can we earn God's love? The Savior taught: 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love.' ... May each of us adequately play our role... by striving for perfection, by being obedient to all the laws and ordinances of the gospel ..."

Martin Petersen, in his speech, said:

"Salvation ... comes only to those who faithfully obey His commandments and accept all of His orders. ... Unless we have this change of heart, unless we follow the Savior's teachings, our sins may cancel out all the benefits we otherwise might receive through the ordinances of the church. ..."

At this conference the speakers made many fine statements about the atonement of Christ and salvation by faith in him. But through it all ran the thought: "It's what you do that counts!" As shown above, for the LDS "gospel" is a matter of "laws and ordinances," something people do, ceremonies and rituals to be performed by the faithful.

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Conclusion: Jesus condemns every means of coming to God through an individual's reliance on "the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:20). Jesus wants people to understand "gospel" as being the "good news" of what he has done to make good for the sins of mankind by his holy life and his innocent substitutionary death on the cross. Jesus said that religions which lead people to rely on obedience to "laws and ordinances" for salvation are only hindering people from discovering him as their only hope of eternal life.

II. WHEN IS A PERSON RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD?

Consider Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14). The publican prayed: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (v. 13). Jesus said that he "went down to his house justified rather than the other" (v. 14). According to Mormon thinking the Pharisee, with all his attention to religious duties and with his high standing in the community, should have stood high in God's favor. But Jesus said no. In his pride the Pharisee asked God for nothing - and that's exactly what he received. Only the publican was forgiven.

Salvation, meaning God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life for repentant sinners, is ours only by the grace of God - his undeserved mercy, his love for fallen sinners - raising us through Word and sacrament to the position of being his adopted children through faith in Christ Jesus. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4). Study also Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 43:11,25, 53:5, Matthew 18:11, Luke 2:11, John 1:17,29, 3:1-21, 20:31, Acts 4:12, Romans 1:16, 3:24,28, 8:3-4,15, First

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Corinthians 2:12-13, Galatians 3:26, 1 Timothy 2:5-6, 2 Timothy 3:15-16, 1 John 3:1.

Mormonism teaches that a person should do good works for his own benefit, to raise his standing in the eyes of God. Jesus, to the contrary, said: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The greatest good works of a Christian are the things he does that most effectively attract other people to discover and appreciate for themselves the saving grace of God.

Once a person is made alive in Christ, once he has received everything necessary for eternal life as a free gift of God's grace, then he can't help spending the rest of his life on earth serving God in love. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Conclusion: Jesus condemns the self-righteousness and foolish pride of all who reject his perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. No true Christian should ever think of earning by his own good works the blessings that are his already by the grace of God. This attitude can only anger God.

III. WHAT ABOUT TITHING?

In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee says: "I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:12). Jesus had more to say about the Pharisees' attitude toward tithing: "But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done,

and not to leave the other undone" (Luke 11:42). Jesus added the last line above because the Old Testament ceremonial law which included tithing would not be erased for the Jews until his suffering, death and resurrection (Colossians 2:16-17).

For the Pharisees, tithing (giving 10% of one's income) was something to be exactly observed as they tried to merit God's favor. It's the same for the LDS. As one missionary told me, a Mormon who refuses to tithe can't hope to reach the highest level of heaven (where, as they imagine it, the good Mormon can become a god himself) because of his "lack of obedience." However, he said, "sincere repentance" and the resumption of tithing would open the way again for him.

By contrast, Christians know that God's command to tithe was given only to the Jews who lived in Old Testament times. In the New Testament age God motivates us to give proportionately as he has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2), our love responding to his love (1 John 4:19). We shouldn't ask God: "How much do I have to give?" Instead we ask ourselves: "How much has God made it possible for me to give; what does he want to accomplish through me, his steward?"

God makes it possible for some people to give much more than 10% of their income. Or, if God sees fit to bless others with a very limited income, such people can serve God in other ways by using the talents that he has given to them. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Conclusion: Jesus says that tithing, in and of itself, has nothing at all to do

with a person's going to heaven. If a Christian chooses to tithe, this is just another fruit of his faith as God helps him in sanctified living.

IV. MUST A PERSON BELONG TO "THE RIGHT CHURCH" TO BE SAVED?

How important is membership in a particular church, in and of itself? In Jesus' day, the religious leaders of Israel took great pride in their church membership - a physical descent from Abraham - as if that gave them an automatic ticket to heaven. But listen to what John the Baptist told them: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ... Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:7-9).

Jesus called the Pharisees a "generation of vipers" (Matthew 12:34), and condemned them for their pride in their ancestry, also their rejection of him as their only Savior. Study John 8:33-59. "Ye are of your father the devil," (John 8:44) Jesus told them.

Membership in the LDS Church is supposed to be all-important for anyone who wants to reach the Mormons' highest levels of heaven. That is why they practice baptism for the dead - to give people who never had a chance, or who rejected Mormonism while they lived, the opportunity to become Mormons after the resurrection. But God says: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27). There is no second chance for anyone after death.

What did the Apostle Paul say about all of this? Read chapter 4 of Romans. Paul could say that he, too, was a descendant of Abraham, his "father, as pertaining to the flesh" (Romans 4:1). But this meant nothing at all to him as having anything to do with his being saved. Instead, Paul said, he and every believer was saved only by a personal faith in the promise of God concerning the Messiah who came to bear the sins of all. (Romans 4:16-17). "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3).

Conclusion: Jesus had nothing good to say about people who encourage others to suppose that membership in "the right church" is a prime requirement for salvation. There is no value in belonging to the family of a glorified Joseph Smith or Brigham Young in the eternity that follows the resurrection.

V. WHAT ABOUT "AUTHORITY"?

The LDS emphasize that they have their apostles and a priesthood without which there can be no true church. The Pharisees likewise questioned John the Baptist's authority to baptize (John 1:19-28). Nor did they accept Jesus' authority to forgive a repentant sinner (Luke 5:21, 7:49). They asked: "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" (John 7:48). The Pharisees made people afraid to step out of line in confessing Christ (John 12:42-43). See also Luke 20:1-2 and Mark 1:22.

Claiming for themselves alone the right to speak for God, the Pharisees faulted Jesus for healing on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10-14,

Luke 6:6-11), for letting his disciples "thresh grain" on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-2), and for not teaching his disciples to observe "proper" ceremonies such as washing their hands (Matthew 15:1-14, Mark 7:1-13, Luke 11:37-40). Jesus gave them God's answer (from Isaiah 29:13): "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3).

The LDS have their own traditions, the Doctrine and Covenants, for instance, which contradict the Bible. They would have us accept their "traditions" (which contradict even their Book of Mormon) simply on the authority of their "prophets" who have given them to the LDS. They emphasize the authority vested in their leaders. Following that authority, they emphasize the importance of the temple ceremonies such as, for instance, the washing connected with temple marriages.

Conclusion: Jesus condemns those who claim the authority to substitute their own traditions and ceremonies for his truth. Authority, in and of itself, is worth nothing if people in authority reject God's truth.

VI. HOW OFTEN SHALL I FORGIVE?

In Doctrine and Covenants (98:23-44) we find: "But if he trespass against thee the fourth time (i.e., not being at all repentant) thou shalt not forgive him, but shalt bring these testimonies before the Lord; and they shall not be blotted out until he repent and reward thee four-fold..." (v. 44). This Mormon "doctrine" exactly follows the old Jewish teaching that three times was enough (Lenski, The Interpretation of Matthew, page 708.

The Apostle Peter is to be commended for more than doubling the maximum of three, since he asked Jesus if seven times was enough (Matthew 18:21). Jesus replied (v.22) that Peter should be willing to forgive "seventy times seven" times, that is, without ever trying to keep track of the offenses - and he never qualified his directive by requiring repentance on the part of the one who has committed the trespass.

Conclusion: If the Latter-day Saints pride themselves in the name of "The Church of Jesus Christ..." then they ought to teach correctly what Jesus Christ said about a life-long willingness to forgive others.

VII. WHAT ABOUT POLYGAMY?

Joseph Smith's "revelation" on polygamy is in Doctrine and Covenants 132. Wasn't God's true revelation (1 Timothy 3:2,12) that bishops and deacons should be the "husbands of one wife" good enough for him? Contrary to Leviticus 18:18, Smith married five pairs of sisters. He also married at least twelve women who were married to other men at the time that he married them. (Brodie, No Man Knows My History, a biography of Smith.)

When the Pharisees asked Jesus: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matthew 19:3), they had in mind their own lax practice in following the school of Hillel (Josephus, Antiquities, 4, 8, 23). They practiced a "consecutive polygamy" such as we have in today's divorce ridden society. Jesus told them that they were wrong, that God intended for one man and one woman to be joined in marriage until death ended the union (Matthew 19:4-6).

Conclusion: A church that calls itself "The Church of Jesus Christ..." ought not to blindly follow a founder who by word and deed contradicted Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and the law of God given through Moses.

Note: Jesus also corrected the unbelieving Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-33, Mark 12:18-27, Luke 20:27-38), pointing out, contrary to LDS teaching, that marriage is only for this life, since in heaven we shall be "as the angels" (Matthew 22:30) who, as everyone should know, are never ever married. It is mere sophistry for the LDS to argue that although people can't get married in heaven, as Jesus says, marriages entered into here on earth do last forever. The LDS are wrong to argue that their idea of marriage continuing in heaven is supported by Jesus' words to the disciples: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19, 18:18). The context in which Jesus spoke these words shows that he was talking about heaven being open for all who confess him as their only Savior, and heaven remaining closed to all who in unbelief refuse to repent of their sins.

VIII. WHAT ABOUT OUTWARD RIGHTEOUSNESS, PRIDE AND PROSELYTIZING?

Many people are attracted by the LDS reputation for clean living and civic righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees cultivated a reputation for outward righteousness, too. But Jesus told his followers: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

Reliance on one's own outward righteousness usually leads to a person's setting a lower standard for himself than the standard of perfection set by God (Leviticus 19:2). Or, one can easily

fall into the hypocrisy of making an outward show of righteousness. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in doing alms, praying, and fasting (Matthew 6:1-18, 9:14). Jesus warned against the example of the scribes and Pharisees, "for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:3). See also Matthew 16:6,12, Luke 12:1-2. Jesus warned the Pharisees against their own spiritual blindness (John 9:40-41). "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).

"A man's pride shall bring him low" (Proverbs 29:23). We note the pride of the Pharisees (Luke 11:43, 14:1,7-11). When we remember that a Mormon trying to obey the more than 4000 rules of the LDS considers himself to be "a god in embryo," it is to be expected that many will behave pridefully toward others. In their pride the Pharisees continually found fault with Jesus and even tried to "entangle him in his talk" (Matthew 22:15-40, Luke 7:31-35, 20:20). The LDS today can argue that anything that Jesus is recorded as saying need not concern them if they stand corrected by what Jesus said - for, they say, no one knows except their prophet if a passage has been translated correctly.

It is worth noting that when LDS missionaries go out from door to door they don't call it "evangelizing," which would mean proclaiming the Christian gospel, God's "good news" of salvation. Rather, they call it "proselytizing," the meaning of which is illustrated in Webster by the practice of persuading an athlete to attend and play for a certain school by making the athlete an attractive offer. Mission enthusiasm, of

itself, is not praiseworthy if it supports a message that is not from God. Jesus said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

Is it true that Jesus never "tore down other churches?" Read Matthew chapter 23. "Woe unto you, ye blind guides ... ye fools and blind ... hypocrites! ... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Verses 16,17,19,27,33).

Conclusion: Jesus, in his concern for the souls of people being led to eternal destruction, did indeed speak out against every form of unbelief. He had nothing good to say about outward righteousness, pride or proselytizing. Christians today should follow the loving example of Jesus' concern for souls, equipping themselves with "the whole armour of God" (Ephesians 6:10-18), and not neglecting the use of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17).

* * * *

God still wins victories in bringing people to their Savior despite the opposition of unbelief and wrong teaching. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who came to Jesus by night (John 3). He defended Jesus before the Jewish leaders (John 7:50-52), and he ended up as a believer (John 19:39). We read also that because of the witness of the New Testament Church "the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

God can work the same miracle of saving faith in our day, too, by his grace. There was a "division" among the Pharisees concerning Jesus (John 9:16). There are also many Mormons today who aren't happy, not satisfied that the way that they have been shown to heaven is really God's way. They need a clear Christian witness of God's saving truth from his Word, the Bible. They also need to see Jesus in the Christ-filled lives of Christians who really live what they believe.

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My eight comparisons between Mormonism and the religious "scene" in Jesus' day were part of twenty pages that I added to my first work. I sent a copy to the LDS office that sent me the letter that prompted the comparisons. God calls me to be a witness, too.

Today many fine books are available on the history, doctrine and practice of Mormonism, one of them being The God Makers. There is also a film with that title. Mormonism - Shadow Or Reality, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, is also an excellent work.

With this small work I want to add something to the general work of Christian evangelism. This writing isn't just for the LDS. It should be read by people of any religion or no religion at all who might think that their eternal destiny depends in any way at all on their own best efforts.

Gerhold L. Lemke, Pastor
April, 1986

(*Marjorie, L. Deak*)

לפני־הנהוּ וַיִּמְתּוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אֲשֶׁר
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Christ is the
 end of the law
 for righteousness
 to everyone
 that believeth.
 Rom. 10:4.

אֲדָם לֹא־יְהִינָהוּ בְּאֵהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּבֹאוֹ לְכַפֵּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ עַד־צֵאתוֹ וְכַפֵּר
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 קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: וְהָיָה עֲלָיו מִן־הַדָּם בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים