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9 Things You Should Know About Mormonism

JULY 15, 2014 | Joe Carter

In more than half of the states in the U.S., Mormonism is the fastest-growing religion. Although Mormons consider their church to a restorationist movement within Christianity (they believe the Great Apostasy occurred between the time of the New Testament church and its restoration under Joseph Smith), Mormonism differs radically from the orthodox Christian teachings and beliefs. Here are nine things you should know about Mormon beliefs:

1. In 1838, Joseph Smith claims he was told in a revelation that the church should be called The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Members of the New Testament church were called “saints” (see Acts 9:32, Ephesians 2:19, Philippians 1:1), which is why Mormons call themselves “Latter-day Saints.” As Gordon B. Hinckley, prior president of the LDS church, explains: “They were former-day Saints. We are the Latter-day Saints. It is that simple.” Hinckley adds that they are often called “Mormons” as a nickname given because they believe in the Book of Mormon as the word of God.

2. Mormonism has four written books of scripture: The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ (which claims to be a record of God’s dealings with the inhabitants of ancient America from 2000 BC to 400 AD), the Doctrine and Covenants (a collection of “revelations and inspired declarations” given for the establishment and regulation of the Church of Jesus Christ in the last days (1830 AD – 1978 AD)), The Pearl of Great Price (a selection of revelations, translations, and writings of Joseph Smith), and the King James Version of the Bible (“We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.”)

3. The LDS church teaches that as the Bible has been transmitted over the centuries it has “suffered the loss of many plain and precious parts.” They believe the Bible to be the word of God “as far as it is translated correctly” and that the “most reliable way to measure the accuracy of any biblical passage is
not by comparing different texts, but by comparison with the Book of Mormon and modern-day revelations.” The KJV is the LDS church’s official English Bible, though it has been foot-noted in a way that interprets the meaning to compliment LDS doctrines.

4. The Book of Mormon teaches that only fools say the Bible is sufficient and that other scripture is not needed (“Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible.” (2 Nephi 29:6)). The Book of Mormon contains many linguistic similarities to the King James Bible, including entire passages duplicated word-for-word. For example, the Book of Mormon contains 19 chapters of the King James translation of Isaiah in their entirety.

5. The LDS church subscribes to the doctrine of continual revelation: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” Mormons believe such apostolic revelation is inspired, but not infallible, and can supersede previous revelation, including that found in their scriptures. The only one authorized to bring forth new doctrines is the President of the Church, who, when he does, will declare it as revelation from God, and it will be accepted the church’s First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and then sustained by the body of the church.

6. Unlike Christian Trinitarianism (one God existing in three Persons), Mormons believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate gods. They also believe the Father and Son each have a “body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” but that the Holy Ghost “has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.” According to Joseph Smith, when Adam was formed in the image of God, it was a physical image. God the Father was once a mortal who lived on an earth. He died, was resurrected, glorified, and grew into his deified status. (According to Joseph Smith, there is a “God above the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”) God the Father is the literal father of all spirit-children, including Jesus and the Holy Ghost, whose divinity is derived from the parent-child relationship. Within Mormonism, Jesus is identified with the Yahweh of the Old Testament.

7. According to Mormonism, everything in the universe — including God — is ultimately governed by eternal transcendent laws and principles. In LDS teaching, all the Father’s children (including humans) possess the same potential to become gods (like the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost) since they are of the same species. Every human spirit once existed as a divine intelligence before becoming the spirit-children of the Father.

8. Prior to creation human spirits were literal children of heavenly parents. Although their spirits were created, the essential “intelligence” of these spirits is considered eternal, and without beginning. At a family council, God the Father told the spirit-children that according to his “plan of salvation” they would have to leave their heavenly home, take on human bodies, and be tested before they could progress to godhood. Satan rejected this plan and wanted to implement one that would have involved loss of moral agency. Jesus opposed Satan and offered an alternative plan in which he would take on human form and live a sinless life so that his spirit brothers and sisters could become gods. When his plan was not accepted, Lucifer is said to have rebelled and taken “the third part” of the hosts of heaven with him to the earth to serve as tempters.

9. Mormons believe in a universal salvation for everyone from death (this is what they refer to when they speak of “salvation by grace alone.”). But after the body is reunited with the spirit, humans go to different places:

- **Celestial Glory** — The highest level of the celestial heavenly kingdom is for (married) Mormons who have kept all the Celestial laws and commandments (this is what they refer to by “eternal life”). The lower celestial kingdom is for single Mormons who lived a worthy life and good people (including Christians) who didn’t have a chance on earth to hear about and accept Mormonism. People
in this lower group cannot become gods.

- **Terrestrial Glory** — The terrestrial kingdom is for unworthy Mormons and good people who knew about Mormonism on earth but rejected it until after their death.

- **Telestial Glory** — The telestial realm is for wicked people who rejected Mormonism even after death. They will experience suffering and pain for their sins. It’s similar to the Christian version of Hell, only not eternal.

- **Hell (Outer Darkness)** — Eternal hell is for Satan, demons, and “sons of perdition” (e.g., those who deny the Holy Spirit after receiving it).

**Note on sources:** Wherever possible, I included links directly to official Mormon sources. In other areas I relied on *Mormonism Explained: What Latter-day Saints Teach and Practice* by Andrew Jackson.
Are Mormons Christians?

JUNE 13, 2012 | Justin Taylor

The New York Times published a curious opinion piece by a devout Mormon who insists that he is not a “Christian.”

I’m about as genuine a Mormon as you’ll find — a templegoer with a Utah pedigree and an administrative position in a congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am also emphatically not a Christian.

He equivocates on what he means by “Christian.” Sometimes he seems to refer to a set of historical and theological beliefs (he agrees with Richard Land that Mormonism is “a fourth Abrahamic religion, along with Judaism, Christianity and Islam”); other times to a culture of power and acceptance and behavior (“Being a Christian so often involves such boorish and meanspirited behavior that I marvel that any of my Mormon colleagues are so eager to join the fold”), and he also uses it in verbal form positively (“Mormons are certainly Christian enough to know how to spitefully abuse their power”).

One might think that a Mormon offering a strong defense of dissimilarity from historic Christianity would insist that theology matters. But that’s the opposite of this writer’s approach.

For the curious, the dispute can be reduced to Jesus. Mormons assert that because they believe Jesus is divine, they are Christians by default. Christians respond that because Mormons don’t believe — in accordance with the Nicene Creed promulgated in the fourth century — that Jesus is also the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Jesus that Mormons have in mind is someone else altogether. The Mormon reaction is incredulity. The Christian retort is exasperation. Rinse and repeat.

I am confident that I am not the only person — Mormon or Christian — who has had enough of the acrimonious niggling from both sides over the nature of the trinity, the authority of the creeds, the significance of grace and works, the union of Christ’s divinity and humanity, and the real color of God’s underwear.

Regarding the statement I’ve italicized: I understand that (1) this is an opinion piece, (2) that most Mormons don’t understand the Trinity, and (3) that many evangelicals—to use Robert Letham’s indictment—are “functional modalists”—but one would still think that the Paper of Record would flag a historical error this significant. The pro-Nicene theology emerging from the fourth century most certainly did not say that Jesus is the Father and the Spirit. That is a heretical belief.

For those who would be helped by a review of some of the key differences between Mormonism (or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) and historic Christianity, I once constructed a Q&A format from the ESV Study Bible article on religious cults and sects (article available online to subscribers). It’s an attempt to be concise and accurate without being overly simplistic.
What do Mormons believe about apostasy and restoration?

Mormons claim that “total” apostasy overcame the church following apostolic times, and that the Mormon Church (founded in 1830) is the “restored church.”

What’s the problem with this understanding?

If the Mormon Church were truly a “restored church,” one would expect to find first-century historical evidence for Mormon doctrines like the plurality of gods and God the Father having once been a man. Such evidence is completely lacking. Besides, the Bible disallows a total apostasy of the church (e.g., Matt. 16:18; 28:20; Eph. 3:21; 4:11-16), warning instead of partial apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1).

What do Mormons believe about God?

Mormons claim that God the Father was once a man and that he then progressed to godhood (that is, he is a now-exalted, immortal man with a flesh-and-bone body).

What does the Bible teach about the nature of God?

Based on the Bible, God is not and has never been a man (Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9). He is a spirit (John 4:24), and a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Furthermore, God is eternal (Ps. 90:2; 102:27; Isa. 57:15; 1 Tim. 1:17) and immutable (or unchangeable in his being and perfections; see Ps. 102:25-27; Mal. 3:6). He did not “progress” toward godhood, but has always been God.

What do Mormons believe about the Trinity and polytheism?

Mormons believe that the Trinity consists not of three persons in one God but rather of three distinct gods. According to Mormonism, there are potentially many thousands of gods besides these.

What does the Bible teach about the Triune God?

Trusting in or worshiping more than one god is explicitly condemned throughout the Bible (e.g., Ex. 20:3). There is only one true God (Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 44:6, 8; 45:18; 46:9; 1 Cor. 8:4; James 2:19), who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

What do Mormons believe about human exaltation?

Mormons believe that humans, like God the Father, can go through a process of exaltation to godhood.

What does the Bible teach about humanity?

The Bible teaches that the yearning to be godlike led to the fall of mankind (Gen. 3:4ff.). God does not look kindly on humans who pretend to attain to deity (Acts 12:21-23; contrast Acts 14:11-15). God desires humans to humbly recognize that they are his creatures (Gen. 2:7; 5:2; Ps. 95:6-7; 100:3). The state of the redeemed in eternity will be one of glorious immortality, but they will forever remain God’s creatures, adopted as his children (Rom. 8:14-30; 1 Cor. 15:42-57; Rev. 21:3-7). Believers will never become gods.
What do Mormons believe about Jesus?

Mormons believe that Jesus Christ was the firstborn spirit-child of the heavenly Father and a heavenly Mother. Jesus then progressed to deity in the spirit world. He was later physically conceived in Mary’s womb, as the literal “only begotten” Son of God the Father in the flesh (though many present-day Mormons remain somewhat vague as to how this occurred).

What does the Bible teach about Jesus?

Biblically, the description of Jesus as the “only begotten” refers to his being the Father’s unique, one-of-a-kind Son for all eternity, with the same divine nature as the Father (see note on John 1:14; cf. John 1:18; 3:16, 18; see also John 5:18; 10:30). Moreover, he is eternal deity (John 1:1; 8:58) and is immutable (Heb. 1:10-12; 13:8), meaning he did not progress to deity but has always been God. And Mary’s conception of Jesus in his humanity was through a miracle of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20).

What do Mormons believe about our eternal destiny?

Mormons believe that most people will end up in one of three kingdoms of glory, depending on one’s level of faithfulness. Belief in Christ, or even in God, is not necessary to obtain immortality in one of these three kingdoms, and therefore only the most spiritually perverse will go to hell.

What does the Bible teach about our eternal destiny?

The Bible teaches that people have just two possibilities for their eternal futures: the saved will enjoy eternal life with God in the new heavens and new earth (Phil. 3:20; Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5), while the unsaved will spend eternity in hell (Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 20:13-15).

What do Mormons believe about sin and atonement?

Mormons believe that Adam’s transgression was a noble act that made it possible for humans to become mortal, a necessary step on the path to exaltation to godhood. They think that Christ’s atonement secures immortality for virtually all people, whether they repent and believe or not.

What does the Bible teach about sin and atonement?

Biblically, there was nothing noble about Adam’s sin, which was not a stepping-stone to godhood but rather brought nothing but sin, misery, and death to mankind (Gen. 3:16-19; Rom. 5:12-14). Jesus atoned for the sins of all who would trust him for salvation (Isa. 53:6; John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

What do Mormons believe about salvation?

Mormons believe that God gives to (virtually) everyone a general salvation to immortal life in one of the heavenly kingdoms, which is how they understand salvation by grace. Belief in Christ is necessary only to obtain passage to the highest, celestial kingdom—for which not only faith but participation in Mormon temple rituals and obedience to its “laws of the gospel” are also prerequisites.
What does the Bible teach about salvation?

Biblically, salvation by grace must be received through faith in Christ (John 3:15-16; 11:25; 12:46; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22-24; Eph. 2:8-9), and all true believers are promised eternal life in God’s presence (Matt. 5:3-8; John 14:1-3; Rev. 21:3-7).
The FAQs: Are Mormons Christian?

APRIL 24, 2012 | Joe Carter

“Are Mormons Christian?” Since the 1820s, when Joseph Smith founded the religious movement, evangelicals and other orthodox Christians have answered with a resounding “no.” Over the past decade, though, many Americans have begun to provide a different response. In an interview with CNN, megachurch pastor Joel Osteen said that while the Mormon faith is “not traditional Christianity” he still views them as “brothers in Christ.”

And earlier this month, the widely read evangelical blogger David French wrote,

I'd argue that our view of salvation—whether Arminian or Reformed—is of enormous consequence, going directly not only to the nature of God but also how we understand each moment of our lives, yet I rarely hear anyone seriously ask, “Are Methodists Christian?” Perhaps that's not so much because the theological differences aren't real and profound but because we've made our historical peace through shared understanding of our faith in Christ. Perhaps its time that we make that same peace with Mormons.

Are Mormons our fellow “brothers in Christ?” Are the theological distinctions between Mormonism and evangelicalism similar to the differences between Presbyterians and Methodists?

In order to examine these questions, I've compiled answers from various resources and subject-area experts and presented them in the form of a FAQ. This article is not intended to be an in-depth explanation of Mormon history or theology, but rather an examination of areas that are relevant to the question of whether Mormons should be considered by evangelicals to be Christians. For more information on Mormonism I recommend Andrew Jackson's *Mormonism Explained: What Latter-day Saints Teach and Practice*.

**What do Mormons believe about God?**

Mormons claim that God the Father was once a man and that he then progressed to godhood (that is, he is a now-exalted, immortal man with a flesh-and-bone body). (1 – ESV Study Bible article on religious cults)

According to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints *Doctrine and Covenants*, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also;” but “The Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.”

As Kevin DeYoung says,

Whether God the Father is self-existent is unclear. There was a long procession of gods and fathers leading up to our Heavenly Father. Brigham Young once remarked, “How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds.” What is clearer is that the Mormon God is not a higher order or a different species than man. God is a man with a body of flesh and bones like us. (2 – Kevin DeYoung, “Mormonism 101”)
Do Mormons believe in the Godhead?

Yes, but Mormons mean something completely different by the term “Godhead” than it has been understood throughout Christian history. As Mormon leader Bruce D. Porter explains,

The Book of Mormon refers in several passages to God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost as “one God,” but Latter-day Saints understand this to mean they are one in mind, purpose, will, and intention. Their unity is the same unity of which Christ spoke in his high-priestly prayer following the Last Supper: that his disciples may “be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21). Hence, Latter-day Saints rarely use the term Trinity, but prefer the title Godhead to refer to the three divine beings who govern our universe in perfect oneness.” [emphasis in original] (3 – Porter, “Is Mormonism Christian?”)

Do Mormons believe in the Trinity?

No. As the religion scholar Gerald R. McDermott notes, “At the end of his life, in his King Follett funeral sermon (1844), Joseph Smith prophesied against the Trinity, saying that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate Gods.” (3 – McDermott, “Is Mormonism Christian?

What is the Mormon view of Jesus?

Mormons believe that Jesus Christ was the firstborn spirit-child of the heavenly Father and a heavenly Mother. Jesus then progressed to deity in the spirit world. He was later physically conceived in Mary’s womb, as the literal “only begotten” Son of God the Father in the flesh (though many present-day Mormons remain somewhat vague as to how this occurred). (1)

Porter explains that,

A vital aspect of Latter-day Saint theology—and its most obvious difference from traditional Christianity—is the belief that Jesus Christ is an individual being, separate from God the Father in corporeality and substance. Mormons do not accept the phrase in the Nicene Creed that describes the Father and Son as being “of one substance,” nor do we accept subsequent creeds by ecumenical councils that sought to clarify the nature of the Trinity in language describing them as one indivisible spiritual being. (2)

How many Gods do Mormons believe exist?

At least four separate gods. The Encyclopedia of Mormonism teaches that there is a “Mother in Heaven,” who is like the Heavenly Father “in glory, perfection, compassion, wisdom, and holiness.” God “is plural,” it declares.

Is Mormonism polytheistic?

Mormons deny they are polytheistic. As McDermott explains,

The theologian Stephen Robinson denies that Mormonism is polytheistic, and strictly speaking he is right. Polytheism portrays a world in which competing gods either vie for ultimate authority or have delimited provinces over which they rule. The Mormon picture is closer to henotheism, which posits a supreme God over other lesser, subordinate gods. The Mormons say that the Father is at least functionally over the Son and the Holy Ghost, and they are the only Gods with which we have to do.
**How do Mormons view orthodox Christians?**

That we are apostates. Mormons claim that “total” apostasy overcame the church following apostolic times, and that the Mormon Church (founded in 1830) is the “restored church.” (1)

**Are Mormons Christian?**

No. On many key points Mormon beliefs are antithetical to historic Christian orthodoxy. However noble the intentions for wanting to include them as “brothers and sisters in Christ,” we do violence to the historical understanding of the term “Christian” by expanding it to mean those who have rejected orthodox Christian beliefs for a nineteenth-century heretical theology.

We can't love our neighbor and turn a blind eye to their eternal fate. We should therefore pray diligently that our friends and family who put their trust in this false religion might come to know and accept the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Sources:**

1 – ESV Study Bible article on religious cults as quoted by Justin Taylor

2 – Kevin DeYoung, “Mormonism 101”

Mormonism is back in the news. And with two Mormon presidential candidates, including Mitt Romney (the front runner for the Republican nomination), there’s a good chance we will be hearing much more about Mormonism for the next twelve months. Denny Burk has a very helpful piece on whether Mormonism is a cult, and Albert Mohler has written a thoughtful article on “Mormonism, Democracy, and the Urgent Need for Evangelical Thinking.” I won’t repeat their arguments, except to reiterate Mohler’s reminder that voting for a president should include examining the candidate’s religious beliefs, but should include other considerations as well.

Presidential elections are important. But believing the truth is even more important. With that in mind, I thought it might be helpful to provide a brief overview of Mormon history and theology. I won’t try to debunk Mormonism or prove Christianity. But I hope this quick survey will show that the two are not the same.

A quick note on secondary sources: Christian materials do not always treat Mormonism fairly or go the extra mile to present Mormon ideas as a Mormon would recognize it. One book that does is Andrew Jackson’s *Mormonism Explained: What Latter-day Saints Teach and Practice*. I also recommend *A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-Day Saints* by BYU professor Robert Millet. Richard Mouw concedes too much in his Foreword and Afterword, but it’s still helpful to get Mormon Christology from a Mormon himself.

**Mormon History**

Joseph Smith was born in rural Vermont in 1805, the fourth of nine children. With little success farming in Vermont, the Smith family moved west to Palmyra, New York. There Joseph Smith was exposed to different revival movements, and most of his family became Presbyterians, though Smith later said he leaned toward Methodism.

The presence of so many variations of Christianity bothered Smith. Which one was right? How could he choose? At one revival meetings, a preacher quoted from *James 1:5* “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (KJV). Smith, 14 years old at the time, went home, reflected on these words, and went into the woods to pray.

According to Mormon tradition, this is when Joseph Smith had his first vision. In this visions, which is foundational to the Mormon faith, Smith claimed to see two “personages.” The one-God the Father pointed to the other and said “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” Smith asked them what sect he should join. They answered that he should join none of them. They were all wrong. All their creeds were an abomination and their believers corrupt.

Three years later, Mormons believe Smith received another vision. In this vision the angel Moroni told Smith of golden plates buried under a hill near Palmyra. The plates were revealed in 1827 when Smith was provided with two reading crystals—urim and thummim—by which he could translate the writing (Smith claimed the plates were written in hieroglyphics). In 1830 Smith published *The Book of Mormon*, which contains the story of the lost Israelites who migrated to America in the sixth
century BC but were killed in battle in AD 428. Smith later received another vision from John the Baptist giving him the Aaronic Priesthood.

That same year (1830) Smith founded the “Church of Christ.” In 1838 he changed the name to “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.”

Smith continued to receive revelations telling him to move from New York to Ohio to Missouri and eventually to Illinois where he and his followers built a town called Nauvoo. There Smith and his followers tried to live out an utopian vision of society. They also instituted polygyny as early Mormon leaders argued that Jesus had had many wives. Smith and his brother were arrested in 1844. Later a mob stormed the jail and killed them both. Mormons consider Smith a martyr. Others say he died in a violent shoot-out.

Following Smith’s death there was a schism. A small group called the Josephites became the Reorganized Church with headquarters in Missouri. Most followed Brigham Young, who became their First President and prophet. In 1847, Young took the followers to Utah and built Salt Lake City.

Today there are more than ten million Mormons worldwide—about half in the United States. Mormonism is the largest new religious movement from the West since Christianity (which really came from the Near East). It is also the first homegrown American religion. Mormonism continues to grow because of its missionary impulse and its commitment to doctrinal and ethical distinctives.

**Mormon Theology**

Let me highlight seven areas of Mormon doctrine. Again, I won’t try to refute the Mormon position, but I hope you will see the explicit deviation from the historic Christian faith.

1. **View of history.** In Mormon thinking, the rise of Mormonism was not merely a reformation or renewal of the church. It was a complete restoration. Following the death of Christ’s apostles, the church fell into complete apostasy. The church lost divine authority and true doctrine. There is no unbroken continuity from the early church to the present. Christianity, for almost all of its history, was false and without the truth—until Joseph Smith and his revelation. As Mohler points out, Mormonism not only rejects historic orthodox Christianity, their whole religion is based on the need for such repudiation.

2. **View of revelation.** Mormons believe the Bible (the KJV version), but do not consider it inerrant. Neither do they consider the Bible complete. What makes Mormonism unique is their belief in continuing revelation sustained through prophets, seers, and revelators. So while Mormons affirm the Bible, they also affirm the inspiration of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Through an elaborate hierarchy of President, First Presidency, Twelve Apostles, First Quorum of the Seventy, and Second Quorum of the Seventy, Mormons can receive authoritative interpretations and new authoritative revelations.

3. **View of man.** According to Mormon theology, men and women are the spirit sons and daughters of God. We lived in a premortal spirit existence before birth. In this first estate we grew and developed in preparation for the second estate. In this second estate we walk by faith in this second state. A veil of forgetfulness has been placed over our minds so we don’t remember what we did and who we used to be in our premortal existence. Our purpose in this life is to grow and mature in a physical body to prepare us for our final eternal state.
Mormons do not believe in human depravity. We are not implicated in Adam’s fall. We are basically good in our eternal nature, but prone to error in our mortal nature. The human is a being in conflict, but also a being with infinite potential.

4. View of God. In Mormon thought, God has a physical body. According to Doctrine and Covenants, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also;” but “The Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.”

Whether God the Father is self-existent is unclear. There was a long procession of gods and fathers leading up to our Heavenly Father. Brigham Young once remarked, “How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds.” What is clearer is that the Mormon God is not a higher order or a different species than man. God is a man with a body of flesh and bones like us.

Mormons do not believe in the Trinity. They will talk about the unity of three personages, but the unity is a relational unity in purpose and mind, not a unity of essence. The three separate beings of the Godhead are three distinct Gods.

5. View of Christ. Mormons believe Jesus is Redeemer, God, and Savior. He is endless and eternal, the only begotten son of the Father. Through Jesus, the Heavenly Father has provided a way for people to be like him and to live with him forever.

But this familiar language does not mean the same thing to Mormons as it does to Christians. Jesus was born of the Father just like all spirit children. God is his Father in the same way he is Father to all. Whatever immortality or Godhood Jesus possesses, they are inherited attributes and powers. He does not share the same eternal nature as the Father. Jesus may be divine, but his is a derivative divinity. As one Mormon theologian puts it, Jesus “is God the Second, the Redeemer.”

6. View of the Atonement. Mormons believe Jesus died for sins and rose again from the dead. The atonement is the central event in history and essential to their theology. And yet, Mormons do not have a precise doctrine of the atonement. They do not emphasize Christ as wrath-bearing substitute, but emphasize simply that Christ somehow mysteriously remits our sins through his suffering.

While the atonement itself is not overly defined, the way in which the atonement is made efficacious is much more carefully delineated. Salvation is available because of the atoning blood of Christ, but this salvation is only received upon four conditions: faith, repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end by keeping the commandments of God (which include various Mormon rituals).

Finally, it should be noted Mormon theology stresses the suffering in the garden rather than the suffering on the cross. Atonement may have been completed on Golgotha, but it was made efficacious in Gethsemane.

7. View of salvation. The goal of Mormon salvation is not about escaping wrath as much as it is about maximizing our growth and insuring our happiness. Salvation is finding our way back to God the Father and recalling our forgotten first estate as his premortal spirit children.

Mormon theology teaches that we cannot receive eternal reward by our own unaided efforts. In some respects, salvation is based on what we have earn, but what we earn is by grace. How this plays out in Mormon life may differ from person to person, but they stress that the gift of the Holy Ghost is conditional upon continued obedience. Mormons must keep the First Principles and Ordinances, which consists of the Ten Commandments, tithing, chastity, and the “Word of Wisdom” which prohibits tobacco, coffee tea, alcohol and illegal narcotics.
Temples are also important in Mormon doctrine and practice. Couples must be married in a Mormon temple to have eternal marriage, and every Mormon must be baptized in one of their 135 (and counting) authorized Temples. Because of the importance of baptism in the Temple, baptisms for the dead are extremely common. Mormons keep detailed genealogical records so that their ancestors can be properly baptized. By one estimate more than 100 million deceased persons have been baptized by proxy baptism in Mormon temples. Those who received this baptism are free in the afterlife to reject or accept what has been done on their behalf.

Death in Mormon thinking is seen as another beginning, complete with opportunities to respond to postmortem preaching in the world to come. We will live in the spirit world, and at some point our spirit and body will be reunited forever.

There are four divisions in the afterlife. The Lake of Fire is reserved for the Devil, his demons, and those who commit the unpardonable sin. The Telestial Kingdom is where the wicked go. It is a place of suffering but not like the Lake of Fire. Most people go to the Telestial Kingdom where they are offered salvation again. The lukewarm—not quite good, not quite evil—go to the Terrestrial Kingdom when they die. This Kingdom is located on a distant planet in the universe. The Celestial Kindgom is for the righteous. Here God’s people live forever in God’s presence. We will live as gods and live with our spouses and continue to procreate. This is the aim and the end of Mormon salvation.

**Conclusion**

I encourage you to study Mormonism for yourself if you have more questions. I think you’ll find that though the language sounds similar at times, the beliefs are quite distinctive. Mormons do not understand history, God, man, salvation, heaven, hell, the cross, Jesus, or the Trinity as the canonical Scriptures teach, nor do they agree with the doctrine taught by the holy, catholic, apostolic church over two millennia.