

## **Why Christianity Over Other Religions? How Does Mormonism Resolve the Problem of Sin?**

### **Introduction**

Mormonism is a unique sect loosely connected with Christianity. Mormons have their own religious texts, follow the teachings of original leaders such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and subscribe to ongoing pronouncements of its president and apostolic leaders. A real challenge to understanding Mormon doctrine is the continual alteration of original texts, such as the Book of Mormon, and sermons/articles earlier delivered by “approved” Mormon scholars. It is abundantly documented that ancient pronouncements have been updated/changed/edited to reflect more modern ideas or to conform with U.S. law. While Mormonism is a vast subject, we will only focus upon matters pertinent to the realm of sin and how to resolve it.

### **1. Main Issues of Mormonism Dealing with Sin**

#### **A. Mormon doctrine minimizes sin.**

1. Joseph Fielding Smith: “the fall of man came as a blessing in disguise... I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin... It is not always a sin to transgress a law... The fall of man... was the means of furthering the purposes of the Lord in the progress of man, rather than a means of hindering them” (Joseph F. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol. 1, p 114-115*; in *Decker’s Complete Handbook on Mormonism 202*).
2. Adam’s sin is redefined as “failing up”: “Adam is one of the greatest men who has ever lived upon the earth... Adam fell, but he fell in the right direction. He fell toward the goal. He fell upward...” (Sterling W. Sill, *Deseret News, 7/31/65*, in *The Changing World of Mormonism 192*).
3. This assessment of sin grows out of the original Mormon belief that Adam was/is God, that he came to earth from another planet where he begot spirit-beings, and he has come to Earth to give them existence in a physical body, thus making them “gods”: “Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is Michael, the Arch-angel, the Ancient of Days!... He is our Father and our God...” (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses, Vol 1, p 51-52, 4/9/1852*, in *Decker’s 23*).

#### **B. Mormon doctrine minimizes grace and emphasizes human progression to godhood.**

1. This is summarized in a 1964 General Conference speech by Hugh B. Brown: “Our doctrine of man is positive and life affirming... We refuse to believe, with some churches of Christendom, that the biblical account of the fall of man records the corruption of human nature... We do not believe that man is incapable of doing the will of God or is unable to merit the reward of Divine approval; that he is therefore totally estranged from God and that whatever salvation comes to him must come as a free and undeserved gift” (*CWM 551*). While we reject the Calvinistic doctrine of inherited depravity, we acknowledge the universal sinfulness of man and the inability to save oneself via merit.

2. This insistence on man's inherent goodness and ability to increase in godliness on his own is directly linked to the Mormon doctrine that mankind is heading toward godhood: "Mormon prophets have continuously taught the sublime truth that God the Eternal Father was once a mortal man who passed through a school of earth life similar to that through which we are now passing. He became God – an exalted being – through obedience to the same eternal Gospel truths that we are given opportunity today to obey... We must accept the fact that there was a time when Deity was much less powerful than He is today... Thus he grew in experience and continued to grow until He attained the status of Godhood..." (Milton Hunter, member of the First Council of Seventy, *The Gospel Through the Ages*, p 104; in *CWM* 177).
  3. Bruce R. McConkey: "Salvation in its true and full sense is synonymous with exaltation or eternal life and consists in gaining an inheritance in the highest of the three heavens within the celestial kingdom. With few exceptions, this is the salvation of which the scriptures speak... This full salvation is obtained in and through the continuation of the family unit in eternity, and those who obtain it are gods" (*Mormon Doctrine* 670, in *Decker's* 269-270).
- C. Original Mormon doctrine declares Jesus' sacrifice insufficient. This is the basis of "blood atonement," a distinct feature of early Mormonism but not practiced today.
1. Brigham Young: "There are sins men commit for which they cannot receive forgiveness in this world, or in that which is to come, and if they had their eyes open to see their true condition, they would be perfectly willing to have their blood spilt upon the ground, that the smoke thereof might ascend to heaven as an offering for their sins; and the smoking incense would atone for their sins... It is true that the blood of the Son of God was shed for sins through the fall and those committed by men, yet men can commit sins which it can never remit... they must be atoned for by the blood of the man" (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 4, p 53-54, in *CWM* 490).
  2. Brigham Young: "Suppose you found your brother in bed with your wife, and put a javelin through both of them, you would be justified, and they would atone for their sins, and be received into the kingdom of God. I would at once do so in such a case... I have no wife whom I love so well that I would not put a javelin through her heart, and I would do it with clean hands... There is not a man or woman, who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it" (ibid, Vol. 3, p 247, in *CWM* 494).
  3. There is extensive documentation of these denials of the sufficiency of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Such shows that Mormonism denies Biblical teaching, substitutes its own laws/regulations and, perhaps worst of all, diminishes the efficacy of the blood of Christ.

## 2. Response

- A. Adam is never praised in Scripture for his sin in the garden, such as “he fell upward.” The entrance of sin into the world was in no way an advantage or positive development. Rather, it introduced a spiritual infection of rebellion and guilt that has plagued the earth ever since, through replication by each/every human being. Jesus is portrayed as coming into the world to undo or remove the guilt/consequences of what Adam introduced via his sin.
1. Romans 5:12ff – “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men...” (5:12). “the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many ...” (5:15). etc. Paul’s point in this reference is to the destructive effects of Adam’s sin in contrast to the “free gift” that Jesus brought.
  2. It was by God’s grace that He instituted a plan to save sinful men from the consequences of their rebellion and transgression (Titus 3:4-7; Ephesians 2:5-10).
  3. The whole idea of Adam actually being God; being made from the dust of another planet; procreating the human race to give bodies to spirits from other realms; attaining god-hood... are complete fantasy.
- B. While Scripture does promise that God will give the saved/redeemed a place of glory in heaven, it is not the result of our efforts to achieve such.
1. Jesus told His disciples that He was going away to “*prepare a place for you; I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also*” (John 14:3).
  2. This is not on another planet in the universe, for Peter clearly teaches that this created cosmos will be burned up (2 Peter 3:7, 10-12). Rather, “*if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus... For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*” (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16-17).
  3. Scripture also says that our glorified form will be like that of Jesus, who – in contrast to Mormonism – is not a being with a fleshly body but is spirit: “*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2).
  4. Our bodies will be transformed instantaneously into an incorruptible form (1 Corinthians 15:50-55); we will be in a glorified state (Romans 2:10; 8:18; 9:23). Marriage will not exist in heaven (Matthew 22:30).
  5. These are all anti-biblical ideas that have grown out of the minds of self-proclaimed prophets and promulgated by well-meaning but deceived adherents of Joseph Smith.
- C. The last element to be discussed is the denial that Jesus’ blood is sufficient to take away all sin. This not only denies the clear teaching of Scripture; it again places redemption on the shoulders of man and ties it to his self-atoning works.

1. While we do not advocate Calvin's inherited depravity – that by virtue of connection to Adam we are rendered incapable of responding to God in any meaningful way – we do recognize that *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:22). Sin is the free-will choice of every rational, self-aware human: *“Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death”* (James 1:15).
2. But the good news of the gospel is that the blood of Christ is sufficient for the redemption of every penitent soul that shall ever exist and for both the number/quality of every sin that the child of God may commit in their lifetime: *“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:7, 9).
3. Categorizing sin (relative to its guilt, not consequences) is a human practice. But all sin is a transgression of God's law, and any sin requires a sacrifice that man cannot make for himself. Even the first sin – eating forbidden fruit – was not of a “heinous” nature; i.e., murder, genocide, torture, rape, kidnapping, etc. But it was a violation of God's authority/law, whether there were any other humans present to be hurt by it or not. And it ultimately required a blood sacrifice – not of Adam but of the Son of God – to atone for it.

### **Conclusion:**

Mormonism is a massively confusing/contradictory maze of doctrines that bear all the earmarks of manmade philosophy, the kind warned against by Paul in Colossians: *“Let no one defraud you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head...”* (Colossians 2:18-19). Yet Mormonism condemns all other churches and declares that true forgiveness of sin and fellowship with God depends on joining the Mormon Church and climbing through its various hierarchies – priesthoods, elderships, bishops, stake presidents, etc. eventually culminating in godhood and creating other families on an assigned planet – even as God/Adam did on this one.

Many other doctrines of Mormonism are not found in scripture, leading us to echo Paul's warning to the Galatians: *“Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed...”* (Galatians 1:8).