

McConkie abhorred the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. He mocked it:

We have all listened to sermons by the great revivalists and self-appointed prophets of the various radio and television ministries. Whatever the subjects of their sermons may be, they always end with an invitation and a plea for people to come forward and confess the Lord Jesus and receive the cleansing power of his blood.

McConkie said television broadcasts show stadiums filled with people while thousands go forward to make their confessions and to become born again Christians—"To be saved with all they suppose this includes." In fact, McConkie recounted that while driving his car he listened to a radio preacher exhort people to touch the radio and say, "Lord Jesus, I believe." McConkie, tongue-in-cheek, said:

Unfortunately I did not accept this generous invitation to gain instant salvation; and so I suppose my opportunity is lost forever.

McConkie died fifteen months later.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD

McConkie preached another sermon at BYU a couple of years before the one I just cited (March 2, 1982). This one was precipitated by an unusual occurrence at BYU: Mormon students were meeting in the dorms praying "for a special relationship with Jesus." That set off alarm bells within Mormon Church hierarchy and McConkie was dispatched to put an end to the practice.

Why, you ask, would the Church be afraid of students developing such a relationship with Christ? The answer is that the Church sees itself as the only legitimate functionary of spiritual power. The Church is threatened by anyone who comes into personal relationship with Jesus because he then no longer needs the Church. The Church sees itself as God to its members. All obeisance is given to the Church. Members are disciplined to the Church. The Church pronounces salvation and forgiveness—according to its own rules of conduct.

McConkie addressed the students with great solemnity, promising to "express the views of the Brethren" relative to what the students had to believe in order "to gain eternal life." He opened his remarks by saying:

It is no secret that many false and vain and foolish things are being taught in the sectarian world and even among us about our need to gain a special relationship with the Lord Jesus. I shall...invite erring teachers and beguiled students to repent and believe the accepted gospel...

One of the first things McConkie wanted to make clear to the students was that they should *not* worship Jesus. "We do *not*," he said, "worship Jesus." Neither were the students to pray *to* or *through* Jesus. To do so, he said, is perilous:

(Some "holier-than-thou" students) begin to pray directly to Christ because of some special friendship they feel has been developed. In this conception a current and unwise book, which advocates gaining a special relationship with Jesus, contains this sentence—quote: "Because the Savior is our mediator, our prayers go through Christ to the Father, and the father answers our prayers through his son." Unquote.

This is plain sectarian nonsense. Our prayers are addressed to the Father, and to him only. They do *not* go

through Christ...

McConkie said he recognized that some people would be offended that he counseled the students not to strive for a "special and personal relationship with Christ." He accurately maintained Mormonism does not advocate such a relationship:

You have never heard one of the First Presidency or the Twelve...advocate this excessive zeal that calls for gaining a so-called special and personal relationship with Christ...never, never at any time have they taught or endorsed the inordinate and intemperate zeal that encourages endless, sometimes day-long prayers, in order to gain a personal relationship with the Savior.

In the end, McConkie concludes that the devil may be behind the drive to get people to have a personal relationship with Christ! He said:

I wonder if it is not part of Lucifer's system to make people feel they are special friends of Jesus when in fact they are not following the normal and usual pattern of worship found in the true Church.

THIS IS NOT THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Well-intentioned Christians are often double-minded about Mormonism. They want to be loving. But they shouldn't be naive.

I remember a letter I got from an Evangelical pastor whose daughter was marrying a returning Mormon missionary. He wrote a tear-stained letter. "I didn't want to be negative," he said. "So I never mentioned Mormonism. My daughter was not inoculated against the errors of this destructive cult. Now, I am not even allowed to go to her wedding!"

We must be clear about this. Mormonism has, for more than one hundred years, been viewed by the Body of Christ as a destructive cult. Nearly every leading Evangelical minister understands Mormonism stands outside true christianity. Only the most uninformed or compromised fail to see that. There is a consensus on this issue among bible-believing Christians.

Through the Maze has as its watchword, "The truth without Love is too hard; love without the truth is too soft." That means that a consistent Christian lifestyle requires us to be both compassionate and confrontational, tough and tender. Every time we err by *only* being loving—without the accompanying articulation of truth—we compromise our mission. We must hate sin while we love the sinner.

Mormonism cannot be seated at the table of legitimate denominations. It may be true that we share a common brotherhood with our Mormon friends in the sense that we are all created in the image of God, but we have no fellowship with them in the body and blood of Christ.

As much as we might wish otherwise, Mormons are *not* our Christian brothers. Until the Mormon Church redefines its basic doctrinal positions, such as what it means to be born again, we must continue to challenge it to repent. Until Mormon leaders are able to recognize such simple concepts as what it means to be saved, we must strictly challenge them when they claim to represent Jesus Christ.

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Tell Me Again... You are My Brother?

"I wonder if it is not part of Lucifer's system to make people feel they are special friends of Jesus..."

—Mormon Apostle
Bruce R. McConkie

The Mormon Church's new public relations drive seeks to minimize the doctrinal differences between Mormons and other Christians. It is attempting to be recognized as a legitimate expression of Christianity.

Local Mormon leaders request to be included in city-wide Christian gatherings (for example on the World Day of Prayer), and they want to sit on local ministerial boards. Frequently Latter-day Saints plead with Christian neighbors to accept them as brothers.

I have repeatedly pointed out that Mormonism has not really changed any fundamental doctrinal position. That is evident in the message Mormon missionaries teach privately in Christian homes. In that setting they continue to declare themselves to be representatives of the One True Church.

The new public relations campaign is, therefore, a smokescreen. I have recently stated in this newsletter that the reason for the new strategy is that the Mormon Church wants to be perceived in a positive light so that it can continue to penetrate the Christian community with its radical gospel message.

Interestingly enough, many sincere Latter-day Saints do not understand that the Church to which they belong is being deceptive. They often believe the rhetoric they hear through official Church channels. They sometimes are unable to realize that the public statements do not jive with the real intentions of the Church. This all came home to me recently in an interesting way. Someone protesting one of my Mormon seminars distributed a hand-out which stated:

Mormons *never* have believed that they have a monopoly on truth. Other denominations teach many sound doctrines and much truth which benefits all the world. Mormons, Protestants and Catholics have *much common ground* of agreement. Yes—there are differences among *all* the various sects—but when we join together

in those areas of common agreement and show respect to each other—we in no way compromise other beliefs we hold sacred. It can only please Satan and help his evil work—for people who love Christ to attack other people who love Christ. *Unity is strength*, as we all stand on common ground—to more effectively fight the Devil.

These kinds of assertions sound good, but they simply are not true. They never have been true. From the first, Mormonism saw itself as the Restored Truth revealed to an apostate Christianity. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, recounted his initial encounter with God in what the Church has come to call The First Vision. Smith said God told him:

(All other churches) were all wrong, and...all their creeds were abomination in His sight... (and all who profess those creeds) were all corrupt. (Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith, 1:19—or 2:19 in some editions)

Likewise, Mormon General Authority B. H. Roberts, in the introduction to the official six volume *History of the Church*, wrote that Mormonism's only reason for being was the *complete* corruption of Christianity:

Nothing less than a complete apostasy from the Christian religion would warrant the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints...there was *no possible*

I asked her how she was born again, and she told me that she had accepted Jesus Christ as her personal Savior...From her words, I knew she did not understand what is meant by being "born again" nor what is termed the second birth.

—Mormon General Authority
Elder Theodore M. Burton

excuse for the introduction of a new Christian sect. (History of the Church, Vol. 1, p. XL.—emphasis added)

THE LIBERAL ELEMENT

Confusion reigns within Mormon ranks today as loyal Mormons struggle to retain the belief that they are members of the One True Church, while at the same time they are told that all Christians are their brothers. Some of the confusion stems from the fact that there is a liberal/intellectual faction within Mormonism today. I have tracked this movement since 1985 when I wrote a newsletter article entitled, "The Emerging Mormon Liberal." I cited former Church Historian, Leonard J. Arrington as an example of a Latter-day Saint who had radically redefined Mormonism. Please note, however, his redefinition does not bring him closer to historical Protestantism, but only to a corrupt, liberal Protestantism. In my newsletter I wrote this of Arrington's brand of neo-Mormonism:

When Mormon intellectuals abandon their roots to fly to the high ground of liberalism, they will find the welcome arms of other "Christian" liberals. In the safety of the high towers of liberalism, imbibing the heady wine of higher criticism, they eventually will forge a Brave New Mormonism. In this rarefied air, Mormons will join other liberals where scripture has lost its authority, the blood has lost its power, and Jesus has compromised His divinity.

Arrington's Mormonism is strange indeed. It is a Mormonism in which Joseph Smith may or may not have had any visions. It makes no difference to Arrington. He writes:

What about the Prophet's (Smith) stories: the First Vision? the visit of the Angel Moroni to tell him about the golden plates? the return of John the Baptist to confer the Aaronic Priesthood and of Peter, James, and John to confer the Melchizedek? Can one accept all of the miraculous events that surrounded the Restoration of the gospel?...Because of my introduction to the concept of symbolism (and myth) as a means of expressing religious truth, I was never overly concerned with the question of the historicity of the First Vision or of the many reported epiphanies of Mormonism...It does not bother me at all that, in describing a religious experience, a narrator, a testimony-giver, often resorts to traditional phrases in representing it...the Italians have a useful expression for this sort of thing: "*Se non e vero, e bento trovato*," which means, roughly: "Whether it is literally true or not, it's still true." (*Sunstone*, January, 1985, Vol. 10:P1, p. 37)

MORMONISM IS RADICALLY DIFFERENT THAN CHRISTIANITY

In spite of the protestations of liberal Mormons like Arrington, knowledgeable Latter-day Saints realize that Mormon theology differs radically from Protestantism. The revolutionary revision of Christian doctrine which distinguished early Mormonism from Christianity still persists. That can be clearly seen in many amazing statements coming from Mormon General Authorities during the last ten years. I will cite two of them.

A BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN?

Probably one of the most contentious points separating Mormons and Evangelicals is the issue of how one is saved. Are we born again simply by grace through faith as the Bible teaches (Eph. 2:8) or, is it, as Mormonism teaches, the Atonement of Christ *plus* "obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel?" (The Mormon Third Article of Faith)

Elder Theodore M. Burton, a Mormon General Authority for thirty years, explained the difference between the "Christian" born again experience and that of Mormonism in an address at Brigham Young University on October 27, 1982. He described an encounter he had with a young stewardess while flying to New England in which he attempted to steer the conversation with her "toward the gospel." He said:

She told me that she had recently been converted from her former manner of living and was now "saved." I congratulated her. Then she added that she was now a "born-again Christian."

I asked her how she was born again, and she told me that she had accepted Jesus Christ as her personal Savior and now believed in him. I told her how wonderful that was, but explained that acceptance and belief in Jesus Christ is normally called *faith*. She said, "But I have changed my former way of thinking and living. I am now on the path of eternal life." Again I congratulated her and told her *that* change is normally called *repentance*. "But," she said, "I have felt a marvelous spiritual change come over me which has purged all evil from my soul." I then asked her if this were not a *gift from the Holy Ghost*. "I suppose it is," she admitted, "but I mean I've had a *sanctification* experience, not through any work that I or any other person has done for me, but a work of grace

whereby Jesus has pardoned my sins and promised me eternal life. I don't need any formal church organization to accomplish this. A person needs only that wonderful, spiritual experience, or feeling of grace." She added that she had truly been reborn spiritually. *From her words, I knew she did not understand what is meant by being "born again" nor what is termed the second birth.*

How ironic that a so-called Apostle of Jesus Christ could not understand the simple conversion story. It reminds me of when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Nicodemus "marveled" at Jesus' command to be born again. Elder Burton was apparently as clueless as Nicodemus.

WHAT THINK YE OF SALVATION BY GRACE?

Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie was as confused about salvation as Elder Burton was. Addressing the same student body just two years later (January 10, 1984), McConkie spoke on the topic "What Think Ye of Salvation by Grace?" His opening statement to the Mormon students at BYU was, "I wonder how many of us are aware of one of the great religious phenomenon of the ages, one that is now sweeping through Protestant Christianity, as only one other thing has ever done in the whole Christian Era."

McConkie was referring to revival which accompanied the end of the Charismatic Renewal in which hundreds of thousands of people were born again. At that time movie stars and statesmen, blue-collar workers and students were coming to Christ in unprecedented numbers. They were testifying in meetings and over television about their conversion experiences. McConkie didn't like it. He said this doctrine "that we are justified by faith alone, without the works of the law" was nonsense.

Before addressing this issue, however, McConkie identified what he called the *First* Great Heresy—the doctrine of the Trinity. Of *that* doctrine he said:

The Italians have a useful expression for this sort of thing: "*Se non e vero, e bento trovato*," which means, roughly: "Whether it is literally true or not, it's still true."

—Leonard J. Arrington
Former Mormon Church Historian

This first and chief heresy of a now fallen and decadent Christianity—and truly it is the father of all heresies...It was the doctrine, adapted from Gnosticism, that changed Christianity from the religion in which men worshipped a personal God, in whose image man is made, into the religion in which men worshipped a spirit essence called the Trinity...The adoption of this false doctrine about God effectively destroyed true worship among men and ushered in the age of universal apostasy.

...Nearly a millennium-and-a-half later...the great Christian reformers lit a *new* doctrinal fire...the burning, flaming, heretical fire—that became the second greatest heresy of Christendom...a heresy originating in the same courts of darkness...This second heresy—and it is the prevailing delusion and mania that prevails to this day in the great evangelical body of Protestantism—is *the doctrine that we are justified by faith alone.*