

The Theology of a Member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Regarding our Heavenly Parents

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Abstract

This paper explains the theology of a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regarding his relationship to our Heavenly Parents. It will explain his belief in Jesus Christ's role as his Savior and Redeemer. It will describe his concept of our premortal life, the role of Jesus in the preexistence, and the importance of virgin birth. It will clarify the dispensations of time, and define apostasy, in order to expound on the importance of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It will clarify the role temples play for members of the church, and define priesthood. Finally, it will explain the significance of being a covenant people, and the vital importance of the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage.

Keywords: Apostasy, Christ, Christians, Covenant, Dispensation, Jesus, Jesus Christ, Premortal, Preexistence, Priesthood, Restoration, Savior, Temples, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A Member's Beliefs Regarding the Restored Church of Jesus Christ. A Review of My Theology Having Been Born in the Covenant, and Receiving the Holy Priesthood and Everlasting Gospel.

This paper will explain my beliefs as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who was born in the covenant, and what my relationship is to my heavenly parents. In order to understand my beliefs, I will provide a description of the theology that leads me to come to the conclusion, I am a spiritual son of God, and we are all brothers and sisters. We are all spiritual children of heavenly parents who love us, and want us to become like, return to, and have joy with them in the Celestial Kingdom of Heaven. We will inherit a resurrected telestial, terrestrial, or celestial body (1 Corinthians 15:40-42). The fullness of the gospel has been restored in this last dispensation of time to Joseph Smith, the prophet, who was given priesthood authority, and keys to organize the church.

Understanding the structure of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is vital, in order to understand the theology. I believe Jesus Christ is the head of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and he reveals his will for the whole church to the prophet Russell M. Nelson. God's house is a house of order, not a house of confusion (Doctrine and Covenants 132:8), thus, He provided a structure for the church. The prophet has two counselors, twelve apostles (Ephesians 4:11), and quorums of the seventy (Luke 10:1-17) to provide council when administering the affairs of the church. All of the aforementioned men travel the world, and work with local leaders: Stake Presidents, Bishops, Branch Presidents, and Mission Presidents, as well as, the children, youth, and women's organizations which exist to support families.

Joseph Smith established the oldest women's organization in the United States called the Relief Society and appointed Emma Hale Smith to be President in March of 1842. On August 11, 1878, under the direction of the General Relief Society President Eliza R. Snow, with permission from church leaders, and Aurelia Spencer Rogers organized the Primary program. Primary was created for children 18 months to 11 years. The Young Men's and Young Woman's programs were created for youth 12 to 18. Youth 14 and up attend seminary which was established in 1912, in addition to their secular education. Once they graduate high school, young adults have the option to attend institute classes which were established in 1926. Institute is provided for young adult's age 18 to 30. Adult religion classes are available for those over 30. All organizations have leaders and presidents who work with the prophets, apostles, and the seventies, as well as, local leaders. Every organization in the church uses the same canon of scriptures often referred to as the "Standard Works."

The standard works are ancient and modern texts given to us by prophets of the Almighty God in this final dispensation of time. Previous dispensations did not have the standard works/scriptures. We are blessed to have them before the second coming of our Savior. The standard works/scriptures used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints include: The King James version of the Bible, The Book of Mormon (BOM), The Doctrine and Covenants (D&C), and the Pearl of Great Price (PGP). In order to understand the theology of the church, one must refer to these texts.

The Book of Mormon was translated by Joseph Smith who was prepared to receive them from the Angel Moroni (BOM Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith), and contains writings of the former inhabitants of the American continent. He began translating in earnest April 7, 1829

and completed the translation at the end of June 1829. The translation was completed in 85 days, most likely, he only worked 55 days. The rate of interpretation is roughly 8 to 10 pages per day.

Three witnesses were shown these plates by an angel, and the voice of God declared to them they were translated by the gift and power of God (BOM Testimony of the Three Witnesses). Eight additional witnesses were shown the plates by Joseph Smith (BOM Testimony of the Eight Witnesses). None of the witnesses of the plates is known to have denied their testimony of seeing or handling the plates despite some being excommunicated from the church. These witnesses are important as they follow a pattern that all things are established in the mouths of two or three witnesses (2 Corinthians 13:1). Despite all the persecution throughout his life, Joseph never denied he saw God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, or that he was commanded to translate the Book of Mormon. Joseph sealed his testimony with his blood when a mob stormed the jail cell he was being held in, and shot and killed the prophet (D&C Section 135).

Most Christians accept the Bible as the word of God according to their interpretation of it. God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith at the tender age of 14 to answer his first vocal prayer regarding his question about which church he should join. This question came to him through his study of the Bible, and because there were so many denominations on the earth who had slightly different doctrines and beliefs. While he was reading the fifth verse of the first chapter of the epistle of James in the New Testament, “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.” He decided to ask God which church he should join. The answer he was given was not to join any church because they were all wrong (PGP Joseph Smith History 1:19).

I believe all religions who worship God have truth, and we can find commonality with them. Brother Tad R. Callister, former Sunday School General President for the Church taught, “The Lord’s declaration in D&C 1:30 does not mean that other churches do not have some truth, for certainly they do.” I believe the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I believe more revelation comes through the prophets of our dispensation who continue to reveal more truth. The ninth article of faith in the Pearl of Great Price states: “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.” (PGP The Articles of Faith 1:9)

I believe The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Kingdom of God on earth, and it is the only Church of Jesus Christ with the Authority to act in the name of God that follows the pattern He established when He was on earth. Brother Tad R. Callister said if one were to match the blueprint of Christ’s original Church against every church in the world today, he would find it will only match one, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I believe revelation defined as communication from God has not ceased. While the prophet receives revelation for the church, we are entitled to revelation from God for ourselves and our families. I believe when Christ returns all righteous people of every faith will be on the earth and through missionary work we will all become united.

Members are Christians and Jesus Christ is Our Savior

I am a Christian. I believe our brother Jesus Christ is our Savior. He is the literal son of our Father in Heaven. He atoned for the sins of the world in the Garden of Gethsemane, and died on the cross for those sins. Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of our Father in Heaven in the

flesh, He is perfect in every way. He suffered, died, and rose from death in order that He could lift us to eternal life. God giving His Son was a great act of love.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Unlike me, Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost which descended upon Mary (Matthew 1:18). He was perfect and foreordained to come to earth to atone for our sins, just as we planned in the premortal world with our Heavenly Parents (PGP Abraham 3). God is all knowing, and all powerful, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (D&C 20:12). His purpose is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man despite the fall of Adam (PGP Moses 1:39).

We will not be punished for Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden, rather we will be punished for our own sins (PGP Articles of Faith 1:3). In the premortal life God the Father prepared a plan and chose our Brother Jesus Christ's as our Savior over Lucifer's plan (PGP Abraham 3:24-28). Because of this, Lucifer became angry with God, and did not keep his first estate. He was cast out of heaven, down to the earth (Rev 12:9), with all those who followed him, because he rebelled against God, and sought to destroy the agency of man. When he was cast down to earth, he became Satan, and hoping to make man miserable like unto himself, he began to tempt and try man to disobey God (PGP Moses 4:1-5). Through repentance Christ's grace is sufficient to redeem us from our sins.

Premortal Life the Plan of Salvation and Virgin Birth

In our premortal life we lived with our father and mother in heaven with our spirit brothers and sisters. Those who chose to follow Jesus Christ's plan were born to earthly parents. Learning we are spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Parents in church was reinforced by what

I learned in science. Matter cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed. This confirmation of my belief that we have always existed, and always will, strengthened my testimony of the gospel. This knowledge reinforces my belief in a pre-existence, or premortal existence because something cannot be created from nothing. I must have come from somewhere.

When we die our spirit leaves our body and journeys to the spirit world where we either dwell in paradise, or spirit prison (BOM Alma 40:11-12). Jesus, after He died and before He was resurrected, preached to those in spirit prison (1 Peter 3:19) & (1 Peter 4:6). Because of the atonement of Jesus Christ all who have lived on the earth will be reunited with their bodies in perfect form. Jesus suffered for our sins, the just and the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18). In this plan through His grace, we are saved, and by our works, we prove our discipleship, because faith without works is dead (James 2:20).

The plan of salvation was prepared from the foundation of the world, for all who would believe on Christ's name (BOM Alma 22:13). If Adam and Eve had not transgressed, they would not have fallen, but would have remained in the Garden of Eden having no children, because they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy for they knew no misery, doing no good for they knew no sin. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy (BOM 2 Nephi 2:22-25). Lucifer wanted to take away our agency and force everyone to live God's laws while he received the glory of saving everyone. Jesus offered to atone for our sins and give the glory to God.

Christ offering to act as our Savior in the Fathers plan gave us agency to choose between good and evil while we were here on earth. God chose Jesus as our Savior over Lucifer who wanted to force us all to choose the right, and thus eliminate our agency as children of God. This

is evidence of God's love and trust for us. Even though we would experience the evils of a celestial world, and be tempted by Satan, we would learn love, kindness, and joy. Our Father allowed His Only Begotten Son to be born of the Virgin Mary, as prophesied by Isaiah, to save us from our sins, and give us agency to choose between good and evil.

Therefore the Lord shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew taught us Emmanuel was Jesus Christ, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Mathew 1:23). When Joseph was brought to the knowledge that Mary was with child, he did not want her to be stoned to death. Joseph struggled about what to do, and an angel appeared to him saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Mathew 1:20). This confirmation allowed Joseph to accept the birth of Jesus Christ, and act as his stepfather on earth, and protect both Mary and Jesus from those who would seek to destroy them in the dispensation of the meridian of time.

Dispensations, Apostasy, Restoration and Temples

Every dispensation is marked by a prophet who had authority and keys from God to restore the truths that were lost through apostasy, and dispense the truth throughout the world. Apostasy is a rebellion, or turning away from the truth of the Gospel. We are living in the last dispensation of the fullness of times, before the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What makes our dispensation different from previous dispensations is this one will not end in apostasy. Rather we will be like the city of Enoch.

Enoch restored the truths taught by father Adam, and Zion was taken up to heaven (PGP Moses 7:18-19, 69). Those who remained on the earth fell into apostasy. Noah restored the gospel in the third dispensation, but due to the people's wickedness the Lord flooded the earth, and started over. Noah's dispensation began with only 8 people 969 years after Zion was taken to heaven. Abraham restored the Gospel in the fourth dispensation of time. Moses led the Tribes of Israel out of bondage in the fifth dispensation. Jesus Christ came in the meridian of time in the sixth dispensation to restore the gospel. Jesus organized his church for the first time with twelve apostles to teach the people the truths that had been lost through apostasy. His church consisted of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists (PGP 1:6). Joseph Smith restored the fullness of the gospel in the dispensation of the fullness of times (Ephesians 1:9-10) that had been lost throughout the dark ages, and the seventh dispensation began.

Some of the simple truths Joseph restored are that God has a physical body, the importance of the authority to act in God's name, and the need for the sealing power to link the generations together. We learn from Joseph's vision that the Father and Son are perfect and glorified (PGP Joseph Smith History 1:17). We learn a mission of the Holy Ghost is to testify of the divinity of Christ as our Savior.

Priesthood Authority

The authority to act in god's name is called the priesthood. The Aaronic Priesthood is an appendage to the Melchizedek priesthood restored through John the Baptist who came to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery near Harmony Pennsylvania, as a resurrected man, and conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon them. Per his instruction Joseph and Oliver baptized each other in the Susquehanna River (PGP Joseph Smith History 1:68-72). The ancient Apostles Peter, James, and

John conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowder (D&C 128:20). When the saints completed the restoration of the Kirtland Temple, Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared, and gave priesthood keys to Joseph and Oliver which conferred upon them the sealing power. The appearance of Elijah in the temple fulfilled the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 that stated, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

During Elijah’s ministry, he ordained and anointed Elisha to succeed him. Elijah like Moses before him did not die (BOM Alma 45:19). Elijah was translated, and ascended into heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). The sealing power was important for the building of temples. There is a difference between churches and temples. Temples are the literal house of the Lord, and those who enter into dedicated temples must live by his commandments.

Members obey the Ten Commandments given to Moses. We choose to live the law of chastity, which says that we will not have sexual relations with anyone we are not legally and lawfully wedded to according to the law of God. We obey the Word of Wisdom, and abstain from alcohol. We pay generous tithes, and offerings to the church which are used to build buildings, and take care of the poor and the needy. At this time we live the law of tithing, and anticipate the day we live the law of consecration in its fullness when the Lord asks us to do so. Members who do not live by the commandments cannot be sealed in the Temple.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be married outside of temples, however we believe until we are sealed in the Temple for time and all eternity civil marriage ends when we die. Children born to members who have been sealed are considered to be born in the covenant. They are sealed to their parents for time and all eternity, in the Temple, by a sealer who was given the sealing power that was restored to earth by Elijah to the prophet

Joseph Smith. Children who are not born in the covenant are brought to the Temple by their parents to be sealed as a family forever.

Members who attend the Temple understand the sacred nature of the covenants made. To get the most out of our time at or in the Temple we must be worthy to enter the house of the Lord, as we are His guests. It is a joyous reverent time to feel the closeness to our family who have passed on, our Savior, and our Heavenly parents who anxiously await the day we will be reunited with them. In the Temple we experience preparatory ordinances; the giving of instruction by lectures and representations; covenants; and tests of knowledge. We dress in white to symbolize purity, worthiness, and cleanliness. The Temple is open to the public before it is dedicated, once it is dedicated members holding a temple recommend may enter. The purpose of building temples was for the Lord to reveal the ordinances previously lost (D&C 124:38, 40-41). The Temple is a place to conduct anointings, washings, baptisms for the dead, endowments, sealing of families, and solemn assemblies (D&C 124:39).

Ordinances performed in churches are baptism, sacrament, naming and blessing of infants, administering to the sick, setting apart for church callings, and ordaining to offices. Churches are open to the public, and all are welcome to attend. Many of the ordinances performed in the Church and the Holy Temple of our God are needed for us to be exalted in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Temple is the center of the church's spiritual strength. Satan constantly interferes with members seeking to participate in the sacred covenants made there. Latter-day Saints are a covenant-making people: we make promises to God, and He in turn makes promises to us.

Covenant Children

Just like the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, which he reaffirmed to Isaac, and Jacob that Abraham's posterity would be numerous, entitled to eternal increase, and they would bear the priesthood (Genesis 26:1-5, 24). Members make and keep these same covenants with God. Abraham was told he would be the father of many nations (Genesis 17: 1-10). Christ and kings would come through Abraham's lineage, certain lands would be inherited. All nations of the earth would be blessed by his seed (Genesis 28:1-4, 10-14), and the covenant would be everlasting even through a thousand generations (1 Chronicles 16:15).

At baptism, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints covenant to serve the Lord and keep His commandments. We partake of the sacrament to renew, and remember our baptismal covenants. When men receive the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods and magnify our calling, we become sanctified by the spirit unto the renewing of our bodies. "Then we become the sons of Moses and of Aaron, the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God" (D&C 84:32-40). The new and everlasting covenant in the gospel allows us to qualify for marriage in the Temple, and "be blessed to come forth in the morning of the first resurrection to inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, dominions for our exaltation, and glory in all things" (D&C 132:19).

Children born in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage are natural heirs to the blessings of the priesthood. They do not require a rite of adoption, or sealing to insure their place in the posterity of promise. Rewards for obedience to the commandments are almost beyond mortal comprehension (James E. Talmage "Articles of Faith"). Here, children of the covenant become a strain of sin-resistant souls, and will be linked together as one family, the divine family of God. Sealing families together back to Father Adam is a great comfort for us. Knowing our

loved ones are secured to us through covenants we made with God, is the reason we do missionary and temple work.

We are connecting all generations back to Father Adam and Mother Eve, in order to be one family with our heavenly parents. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are united. The Lord has told us that if we are not one we are not His (D&C 38:27). We pray for each other, we minister to each other, as well as those who are not of our faith. Our faith has been tested and tried, and our people stand united. We invite all to come unto Christ, and rejoice in the fullness of his restored gospel.

My Testimony

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are Christians who worship the living Christ. We believe his house is a house of order. Our theology is derived from the standard works which include the King James Version of the Bible, The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. We believe God is the same yesterday, today, and forever and that he speaks to ordained prophets who hold the priesthood which was restored by John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John. Families will be together forever because Moses, Elias, and Elijah came to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple and restored the sealing power.

Revelation has not ceased, the prophet leads the church, and we lead our families. When we die our spirit will leave our body, and reside in the spirit world. Because Christ is our Savior on earth, we will be resurrected at the beginning of His millennial reign. Thereafter we will have a final judgement and receive one of the Kingdoms of God after our judgement. Christ is a perfect judge because He lived a perfect life as the Only Begotten Son of our Father in Heaven,

and by His Grace we will be saved. We live in the dispensation of the fullness of times, and it will not end in apostasy. We are a covenant-making people, and because the sealing power was restored, we can enter into the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage and have joy and rejoicing in our posterity.

I believe we are one family, a family of God. We are all spirit brothers and sisters. Our physical bodies were made possible because our Father Adam fell (BOM 2 Nephi 2:25). The fall made us subject to the carnal nature of man (BOM Mosiah 3:19), but because Jesus atoned for our sins through repentance, we can overcome our evil nature. After the gift of resurrection, and the judgement of Christ, we can be exalted with our Heavenly parents in the Kingdom of God as one united family, if we keep our covenants.

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