

Pastor Kory's Page

Faith Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD

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“Hello, I’m Elder So-And-So of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”

Many of you folks have probably had the experience of having Mormon missionaries knock on your door. Usually two well-dressed young men are standing there asking if they can tell you a little more about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They'll probably be quite respectful and smile a lot ... But behind the traditional values and polished veneer of Mormonism, lurks a spiritually dangerous and deceptive theology.

This summer, I had a couple occasions to visit with two such Mormon elders. We had some enlightening conversations. They, of course, were trying to convert me, and I, in turn, was hoping that they would give some thought to my questions and sharing of biblical, Lutheran teaching. So what do our Mormon neighbors really believe and how might we respond?

Mormonism is the product of Joseph Smith. Claiming that he received special revelations from God, angels, and saints in the early 19th century, Joseph Smith quickly gained a following and began his own religious organization, commonly known as Mormonism (after the purported American “prophet,” Mormon who supposedly authored the original Book of Mormon on golden plates). The Book of Mormon tells of Jewish peoples populating the Americas and of Jesus appearing to them after His resurrection to restore the true faith. The contents of the Book of Mormon are historically unverifiable products of Joseph Smith’s imagination.

Mormons believe that only they represent the true Church on earth. The official name of the largest Mormon organization, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” *sounds* very Christian. Mormons also try to seem fully Christian when explaining their beliefs, yet their official teachings and their outreach literature play a very different tune from the historic Christian Church. Mormons believe that the true Church essentially became extinct upon the death of Christ’s original apostles, that a great period of apostasy (unbelief and false teaching) began, and that the true Church was not “restored” until Joseph Smith was called as God’s authoritative prophet and priest in the 1800’s.

Mormons have a distorted view of God. Because they place as much or greater authority on Joseph Smith’s teachings as they do the Bible, Mormons have a very different view of God. They speak of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, yet teach that they are “one in purpose, but *separate* in being.” In other words, Mormons do *not* believe in the triune God. Instead, Mormons believe in *many* gods! On the basis of Joseph Smith’s writings and that of other Mormon leaders, Mormons teach that Jesus was once a man who became a god and that, by living according to Mormon teaching, we too can likewise “advance” to become gods in the next life.

Mormons deny the heart of Christian teaching: salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. In conversing with the Mormon elders earlier this summer, I was struck by their apparent belief in God’s free grace in Christ. However, a few statements later, they would again *deny* this foundational Christian doctrine. So what does their official teaching say? From the Mormon Articles of Faith, “We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be *saved by obedience* to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (emphasis mine). Furthermore, Mormon leader, James Talmage, once summarized the Mormon position on salvation in this way: “The sectarian dogma of justification by faith alone has exercised an influence for evil since the early days of Christianity.” The Mormon faith and our Lutheran-Christian faith are incompatible because Mormons deny clear New Testament teaching and twist the Gospel into a series of ordinances that must be obeyed.

Mormons need to hear your respectful and informed response. This is only a brief summary of Mormon beliefs. I would encourage you to learn more so that you can be better prepared to give an answer for your Christian hope, and yet also do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Don’t be afraid to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). In other words, share your Christian convictions, yet in a caring way. Check out the resources on Mormon teaching at www.lcms.org. Ask Pastor Sailer or me for a copy of the “What about Mormonism” pamphlet or check out the little book, *Mormons: How to Respond*, in our soon-to-be updated parish library.

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Kory Janneke

P.S. – Your prayers are much appreciated for our Nicaragua Medical Mission Team!