

Who are the Mormons?

Many Christians seem to think that there is little difference between Mormonism and Christianity. They are impressed by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the clean lifestyle of the Mormon faithful, their missionary zeal and their radio and TV programs.

With the aid of some 50,000 missions scattered across more than 140 countries, Mormonism is growing by leaps and bounds. Growth is taking place in Africa, Russia and Eastern Europe. In Red Square proselytes approach people, "and what they talk about are family, because families everywhere in Russia are disintegrating, and there's a real vacuum," says Merle Amundsen, a non-Mormon from Idaho who recently spent two years in Russia. In an age of moral relativism, the notion of family values, sexual fidelity, and a standard of living that prohibits alcohol, tobacco and even hot drinks, is appealing.

Who are these Mormons, and why can nice people still be so wrong? The fact is, the Mormon who claims to be a Christian denies the key doctrines of the Christian faith.

Joseph Smith (1805-1844) grew up near Palmyra, New York, which had spawned many evangelical, utopian and millenarian experiments in the 19th century. Smith claimed that in 1822 an angel named Moroni told him where gold tablets containing God's revelation were buried. Smith published a translation of the gold tablets, the *Book of Mormon*, in 1830, and in the same year started the "Church of Jesus Christ." The name was later changed to the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints."

The Bible, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenant*, and the *Pearl of Great Price* are the works, which are considered to be authoritative. Joseph Smith claimed that the *Book of Mormon* is also the Word of God.

The God of Joseph Smith has physical and material dimensions. He was once a mortal man who progressed to the level of God. "As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may become." God is a procreating father with a divine mother-wife. God is therefore the literal father of Jesus Christ.

Lucifer and Jesus Christ are spirit brothers as both are the pre-mortal offspring of God the Father. Jesus Christ is believed to be the literal firstborn son of this heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother who became a God in the pre-existence without experiencing mortality. In his pre-existent state he was known as Jehovah. The road to salvation is through belief that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God sent by God. The right to godhead is not through grace and faith in Jesus Christ, but by living a life of good works.

A peculiar teaching for which Mormonism has become known is baptism by proxy or vicarious baptism, performed in a Mormon temple. Mormons believe that the deceased for whom the ritual is performed will have an opportunity to receive the Mormon gospel in the spiritual world.

The temple in Salt Lake City, Utah, is Mormonism's spiritual and ritual center, along with a second temple in Washington, DC built in the early 1970s. Only members in good standing may enter sacred places within the temple. In Salt Lake City are housed the genealogical records of the sect, the world's premier genealogical archive. The Mormons also have a relief program for national and international emergencies. Local congregations hold Sunday morning religious instruction and Sunday evening services with communion and lay preaching.

A list of unique Mormon practices are the following:

- Joseph Smith is the true Messiah -Jesus was his forerunner
- The Book of Mormon has equal authority with the Bible
- God is an exalted man
- A person can earn salvation by good works

Teachings that have changed:

- Polygamy instituted by Joseph Smith, is out
- Black men, originally viewed as inferior to white men are now accepted as equal and may be priests

Practices:

- Tithing ten per cent of income to the church
- Fasting once per month
- Special weekly family study evenings

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