



A Closer Look

at the Truth About the Mormon Family

Their strong emphasis on family is based on their beliefs about eternal destiny.

The TV scene fades with a husband and wife warmly embracing each other and their several children. An announcer says, "A message from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." This short, public-service ad leaves you thinking, "That's what a home really should be; those Mormons sure have good families."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS; also called Mormons) for many years has projected an image of fostering strong, wholesome, closely knit family units. People of other faiths often are amazed by the apparent stability and size of LDS families. Indeed, the LDS church encourages strong family relationships, lasting marriages, and parenthood.

LDS leaders encourage church members to participate in a weekly "Family Home Evening" to promote this emphasis. In this program, LDS families are encouraged to schedule one night a week at home together for a time of study, communication, and fun activities. Local LDS congregations, called wards, are prohibited from scheduling activities that would conflict with the Family Home Evening.

Baptists and other Christians commend the Mormons for their promotion of healthy families. Most Christians naturally assume that Mormons stress family relations for the same reasons as other churches. Christians often are shocked to learn of the underlying theological reasons for the Mormon church's emphasis on the family.

Families Are Forever

A popular LDS slogan is "Families Are Forever!" That saying, to most people, sounds like a romantic ideal that the love a family shares transcends time. However, Mormons consider it to be the literal truth. They actually believe the family unit is intended to last forever.

The Mormon church teaches that husbands and wives can be married not only "till death do us part," but beyond death into eternity. Families may remain together forever in the "celestial kingdom," the LDS designation for the highest level of heavenly glory. Mormon men and women who are sealed together in private "celestial marriage" ceremonies, conducted only in LDS temples, are believed to be joined as husbands and wives forever. Children also may be sealed to their parents for eternity.¹

LDS temples (50 worldwide) are consecrated buildings designed for conducting certain sacred rituals, including endowment ceremonies, baptisms for the dead, and celestial marriages. No public worship services are conducted in LDS temples. Only LDS church members who are deemed worthy enough to obtain a "temple recommend" may even enter a dedicated temple. Most newly built LDS temples are only open for public inspection for a couple of weeks prior to their formal dedications.²

What surprises Christians even more is that the Mormon church teaches that husbands and wives who are joined in celestial marriage may become gods. Mormons believe they can eventually establish and populate other worlds such as this one, provided they have a celestial marriage partner (or

partners) with whom they can produce spirit children in the celestial kingdom. They believe the Mormon husband can become a "heavenly father" and his wife (wives) a "heavenly mother" of millions of newly created human souls.³

This process, called "exaltation" or "eternal progression," is exactly the way Mormons believe our Heavenly Father became the God of this world. They believe He was once a man as we are now, who, along with his wife, progressed to become God. He is now an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone, just one of an unknown number of other gods.⁴

Mormons also believe Jesus was a spirit child of the Heavenly Father who became another god and was chosen as Savior of the world.⁵ The Holy Ghost is a third god who has a body of spirit yet exists in the form and likeness of a man.⁶

Another twist to the Mormon family emphasis is the time, energy, and money spent in genealogical research. Mormons believe it is their responsibility to trace their family history in order to find names of deceased non-Mormon relatives. They believe they can be baptized on their behalf in the LDS temple in order that the relative can attain the celestial kingdom. Dead people are also "sealed" in celestial marriage by proxy for the same reason.⁷

Doctrines Strange to Baptists

These Mormon doctrines seem strange to most Baptists and other Christians. Many find it hard to believe a church calling itself Christian could teach such things. Nonetheless, these unusual ideas are standard beliefs of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is easy to understand, therefore, why they put such a heavy emphasis on family issues. Mormons believe the family not only is an important aspect of their religious life, but it is essential to one's eternal destiny. One can never progress to godhood in the celestial kingdom without a strong family.⁸

Christians do not agree with LDS teachings on

celestial marriage. The Bible certainly teaches that the family is an important element in a person's life. However, the Scripture nowhere teaches that marriages last beyond death or that one's eternal destiny depends on his or her marital status, family relationships, or procreativity. More important, the Bible nowhere teaches that people can become gods. The only biblical character who even suggested such a notion was the serpent (the devil) in Genesis 3:5!

Thus, while Christians respect and commend Mormons for emphasizing strong families, they cannot agree with their reasons for doing so. Elevating any institution, even one as important as the family, to a level of such spiritual significance as do the Mormons is tantamount to idolatry.

The clear teaching of Scripture is that salvation is a result entirely of God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9). It is received by repenting of one's sin, putting one's faith in Jesus Christ, and submitting to Him as one's Lord (Acts 3:19; Rom. 10:9-10). A major function of the Christian family is to encourage children to receive that salvation and grow in their faith. However, one's salvation is an individual decision that ultimately is independent of one's family status.

For a clear, biblically based perspective on the purposes and functions of the Christian family, read *The Bible and Family Relations* by T.B. Maston and William Tillman (Broadman Press, 1983).

For more information on the teachings of the Mormon church as compared to the Bible, contact Interfaith Witness Evangelism, North American Mission Board, or call Customer Service Center, 1 800 233-1123 and request the free Belief Bulletin entitled "Mormons" (0840089538).

Recommended Reading

McKeever, Bill. *Answering Mormon's Questions*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishing, 1991.

McKeever, Bill, and Eric Johnson. *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishing, 1994.

Reed, David A., and John R. Farkas. *How to Rescue Your Loved One from Mormonism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994.

Reed, David A., and John R. Farkas. *Mormons Answered Verse by Verse*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.

Rhodes, Ron, and Marian M. Bodine. *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.

Ropp, Harry L. (with revisions from Wesley Waters). *Are the Mormon Scriptures Reliable?* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1987

Endnotes

1. *Achieving a Celestial Marriage (student manual)*

(Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), pp. 129-132.

2. Boyd K. Packer, "The Holy Temple" (booklet adapted from book of same title) (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), p. 2.

3. *Achieving a Celestial Marriage*, p. 129.

4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), pp. 6, 293.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 34, and Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1985), p. 51.

7. *Gospel Principles*, pp. 247-252.

8. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), pp. 117-118.

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