

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people He chose for His inheritance."

So, who's blessed by God? Yes!- the one He (God) chooses. Don't overlook this simple fact: GOD CHOOSES WHOM HE WILL BLESS: blessed are the people GOD CHOOSES for His inheritance. But whomever God chooses to bless becomes the one through whom God intends to touch many, many others. So the one blessed becomes the conduit intended to carry God's blessings to others, often others who don't even know God. (Abraham's blessing was to be for all the world. See Genesis 12:3.)

Many people think that our country is blessed by God. I'm one of them. No nation in modern history has been so blessed in terms of material goods and a high standard of living. I have no doubt whatsoever that God has chosen this country to be blessed. But, as the Bible says, "To those to whom much has been given, much is expected!" (Matthew 25:23) A country so blessed by God as ours is, which insists on seeing the blessing as something that we have earned, indeed, as something which we deserve, is a nation which is working hard to turn the blessing into a curse. And that's what's happening, isn't it? I mean, the blessing is becoming/has become a curse, hasn't it? Haven't we crossed the line? Isn't it true that the more we have, the more we expect; The more we get, the more we demand? Our nation has become almost completely self-absorbed. The blessing has become a curse.

And what about you? Hasn't God blessed you? Not only has God blessed you and me with material goods, but God has also blessed us with a spiritual blessing: the saving of our souls! Is this blessing for us alone? Or is the fact that God has blessed us with salvation just the beginning of God working through us to touch the lives- to save the souls - of so many others? If we allow ourselves to become too self-absorbed, to simply bask in the warm glow of our own salvation as the world slowly dies, we will certainly turn the blessing into a curse. That is to say, the joy of our salvation will give way to a profound sadness and emptiness.

Whether or not our blessings become a curse is largely up to us. It all depends on what we choose to do with what we have been given. And that all begins with the realization that not everything we have been given was meant to be kept as our own. So, how about it? What kind of a friend or neighbor are you? What kind of a person are you choosing to be?

----- Will you be a blessing? Or will you be a curse? -----

MORMON MATTERS (PART 6) WHAT ABOUT JESUS?

By Robert Sivulka

Introduction

In this article, I would like to distinguish the Mormon doctrine of Jesus from the Christian doctrine of Jesus. I have already set the context of discussion in the past articles on the nature of the Triune God, and have proffered that the Christian doctrine of Jesus declares that He is the second person of God who become man on our behalf. What precisely does this mean, and how precisely is this different from the Mormon doctrine of Jesus being "the Eternal God" (to quote the title page of the Book of Mormon)?

Offentimes, Mormons claim that this question is fundamentally wrong-headed since there is only one Jesus. But this is to confuse appearance with reality. There are many appearances of Jesus, but there is only one Jesus in reality (whether there are any other appearances of Him or not other than the ones He has of Himself). So when the apostle speaks of there being other Jesuses in 2 Corinthians 11:4, we should understand him as speaking of false appearances or understandings of Jesus vis-à-vis the correct appearance or understanding of Jesus, viz., that which the apostle has taught. The question is, who has the appearance or understanding of Jesus that the apostle himself had- Mormons or the Christian Church?

The Jesus of Mormonism

The Jesus of Mormonism is a natural outgrowth of the Mormon Church's view of the *law of eternal progression*. This, in a nutshell, says that we as humans have always existed as intelligences or minds. These minds, through an act of sex between divine parents with glorified bodies, become housed in spirit bodies or spirits. The addition of a mind and a spirit body equals a spirit child. These spirit children grow in heaven until their proper time in which, provided they were not rebellious, are sent to another planet to take on bodies that, among other things, are more tangible than the ones they had in the spirit world. These now mortal humans, through their worthy involvement in the practices of the Mormon Church, may progress on to Godhood over some other planet just as their heavenly parents had done before them. This ensures that divine kingdoms will continue to be established throughout eternity.

Now with this as a background, guess who Jesus is. He is the first spirit child born to our heavenly

parents. Lucifer, or Satan, the demons, as well as every other human on this planet are literally younger brothers or sisters (or perhaps step-brothers and sisters if, as some Mormon prophets and apostles have taught, God the Father has more than one wife). Thus, this Jesus did not create all things (neither did God the Father since He also was born from His heavenly parents). He did not create our spirits, and with the exception of Adam, He did not create our bodies. He certainly did not create the planet He was born on as a spirit child. As a result of this, we must not pray to Him; we can only pray to the Father in the name of Jesus. He only has one nature, viz., that of being a man who has been exalted to a special office, viz., that of being a god.

The Jesus of Christianity

The Jesus of Christianity is a radically different type of person. For starters, Jesus seems to be presented as the God whom all creation owes its existence to in John 1:1-3, & 14, and Colossians 1:13-18. Grant for the sake of argument that we pre-existed in heaven. If we, at least our spirits, were made in heaven, then who according to the Colossians passage were we created by? The passage says the Son made all things "in heaven and on earth," and "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (New International Version, and hereafter unless otherwise mentioned).

Now Mormons will respond by saying that "heaven" here must mean, not the heaven where God dwells, but the heaven of the sky and atmosphere that is the closest to earth. Recall that in Mormonism there are three heavens— the telestial, terrestrial, and celestial. The Bible does not mention these, but it does mention "the third heaven" in 2 Corinthians 12:2. So perhaps we should understand the "heaven" in the Colossians passage as a lower heaven in order to fit Mormon latter-day revelation. According to this understanding, Christ would simply be the creator for *this world*, excluding the heaven of God.

But how does this square with Christ being "the beginning" (Col. 1:18) and He being there at "the beginning" (Jn. 1:1)? Again, Mormons must relativize this beginning as being a beginning for this world; it is not an absolute beginning. Indeed, in Mormonism there is no such thing as an absolute beginning since every God is dependent on some preceding God for various necessities (e.g., a spirit body, instruction, diaper changing, etc.).

The only way I think we can overcome these rejoinders is to focus on the nature of Christ as God. Both passages claim that He is God (Jn. 1:1 refers to the Word as God, and Col. 1:19 says that "God was

pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him," and Col. 2:9 virtually repeats this by claiming that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"). For Christians, the term "God" refers to a personal being with a particular nature. "He" (e.g., Psalms 7:11-13), not a team of separate Gods, has a very unique nature.

Recall what a nature is. A nature is whatever it is that makes a thing what it is. Without your nature, you could not be human. Within the nature of God, He has a set of unique or what theologians have called "incommunicable" attributes. One of those unique attributes is that of eternality. Now Mormons will claim that this is a communicable attribute since we have always existed as intelligences or minds. But if this is the case, then, as I mentioned in the May newsletter, "what would be so distinctive of verses that attribute self-existence or being from everlasting to God (e.g., John 5:26, 8:58, Isaiah 9:6, Psalms 90:2, & Habakkuk 1:12)?" Not only is He from everlasting, but there was never a time when He was not God (Ps. 90:2 & Malachi 3:6). Thus, He does not know of another God besides Himself (Isaiah 43:10, & 44:6, 8, & 24) whom He required help from in order to progress to becoming a God. He is the independent, eternal, and unchanging God. It is in this context that Jesus is the creator of any dependent thing.

It follows from this that the person of the Son of God has two natures, contrary to the Mormon Jesus only having one. As already mentioned, the term "God" for Mormons denotes an exalted office, not a nature. This is crucial! President Clinton can lose his office (which some of you are no doubt hoping he does!), but he still retains his nature, viz., that of being a man. It is being a man that is *essential* to him. In a similar way, Mormons claim Jesus also shares the same nature, but has a radically different office. For Christians on the other hand, the Son is one who with two whats— that of a God nature and that of a man nature.

Contrary to popular Mormon thinking, this is not lifted from the early Christian creeds. It is lifted straight from Scripture. Philippians 2:5-10 speaks clearly of Christ being in the *nature* (Greek— *morphe*) of God and the *nature* of a servant, being in the likeness of man. Charles Ryrie says, "J.B. Lightfoot, after a detailed study of *morphe* in Greek philosophy, in Philo, and in the New Testament, concludes that it connotes that which is intrinsic and essential to the thing. Thus here it means that our Lord in His preincarnate state possessed essential Deity" (*Basic Theology*, 261). This is also the only way to explain the radically different features that were possessed by the person of the Son. For example, Christ is the creator of all things, and yet He is Himself created by Mary

and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-21). Or also, Christ claims not to know all things (Mat. 24:36), and yet His disciples recognize, with His approval, that He really does know all things (Jn. 16:30-31).

This is also crucial to keep in mind when Mormons like Stephen Robinson confuse the two natures and consequently make God out to be a man (*Are Mormons Christians?*, 80-82). Robinson argues that if Jesus is God and Jesus is a man with flesh and bones, then God must have flesh and bones. Memo to Robinson... This is what happens when you are not faithful to the guidelines that the Scriptures clearly lay out (e.g., "I am God, and not man" – Hosea 11:9). Stop confusing the two natures! As God, the Son is not man, and thus does not have flesh and bones to run a 100 yard dash with. As man, the Son is not God, and thus does not fill the heavens and the earth (1 Kings 8:27).

This is finally crucial to keep in mind when Mormons automatically assume that we are in God's nature, since we are His children made in His image (Genesis 1:26). An image is not a nature. We as humans are just as much the children or offspring of God as the mountains and fish are (note the various natures or species here). But in contrast to the mountains and fish, we as humans are in the image of God. This does not mean that we physically resemble God in contrast to the rest of creation, otherwise Data on Star Trek would be in the image of God. It means that we spiritually resemble God in that we can act in uniquely divine ways (e.g., with love, rationality, morality, etc.). We know what kind of image is being referred to by first understanding what kind of being God is, and if God is too great for a body (1 Kings 8:27), then we know we cannot share any kind of physical image with Him. Having said this, two things can resemble or image each other without being of the same nature. For example, dogs resemble cats in that both make good pets (just grant that cats are for the sake of argument). Similarly, we resemble God, but we will never lose our humanness and take on the divine nature.

As a result of Christ being in the nature of God, we can pray to Him. He is not only our brother in His human nature, but He is our creator. Our creator is not simply the first person of God, but the second, as well as the third. We can pray directly to all three of them since they all make up the one being of God. Jesus said, "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (Jn. 14:14, literal Greek). He also said that however we honor the Father, we are to honor the Son in the same way (John 5:18-23). Do we sing to the Father? Then we ought to sing to the Son. Do we pray to the Father? Then we ought to pray to the Son. Finally, the example of the first recorded martyr

of the Christian Church, Stephen, is one where he prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:56). Some Mormons may claim that this was only because Jesus was physically present to Stephen. But why make a special case for physical presence, when Christ as God is really present to us always (Mt. 28:20)?

Conclusion

In this article I have demonstrated that the Jesus of Mormonism is radically different from the Jesus of the Christian Church, and that the Jesus of the Christian Church is the one that best represents the Scripture. Jesus is God, not in the sense of a human holding an office, but in the sense of a person holding a divine nature quite differently from holding a human nature. As God, Jesus is to be considered with all the features that the Scripture uniquely designate to God. Next month we will look at a specific feature of Christ's human nature, viz., his death and its resulting atonement.

News You Can Use

This month's News You Can Use comes from Salt Lake City's Cancer Wellness House. (For more information, you can contact them at 236-2294.)

Suggested prayers for those touched by cancer:

Gracious God, fount of all life, we thank you for sustaining our lives in the midst of turmoil, we thank you for each day and each opportunity to serve one another and you, we thank you for the continued lives of all who are surviving cancer, and we thank you for all the caregivers and researchers who are working on their behalf. Grant us all the wisdom and courage to delight in each moment of life you give us and to do all we can to sustain one another in faith, hope and love. AMEN.

Loving God, we remember before you today all whose lives have been touched by cancer. For all who are living with cancer, that you may encourage and sustain them,

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all who are newly diagnosed, that you may relieve their confusion and fear,

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all whose treatment brings suffering, that you may comfort them with an abiding sense of your loving presence,

Lord, hear our prayer.