

What is the Mormon Church. . . really?

## The “Great Apostasy”

Are all other churches wrong and is the Mormon Church the true restored faith?



Teacher, Yvon Prehn

## Aren't Mormons Christians?

- That's the big question
- When accused that they aren't:
- “Are too! Mormons say. They just center their faith on a different understanding of God, Christ, Scripture and salvation than Catholics or Protestants.” USATODAY, 1-25-2012
- Let's look at those beliefs to respectfully understand and interact
- Quote their leaders
  - <http://www.mormonquotes.com/>



## Brief history

- Church began with Joseph Smith
  - See Fawn Brody's *No Man Knows My History*
- Visions in early 1820s led to his discovery of golden plates, which when translated became the Book of Mormon
- Published BOM & organized the church 1830
- Early Mormons moved to Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, constant struggles
- Smith also wrote *Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price*, a history of the church, many pronouncements
- Smith killed in 1844
- Brigham Young became leader, led followers to Utah
- Utah became a state in 1904



## Why Mormons believe they are the only true church:

- According to Mormons, a **Great Apostasy** began in Christianity not long after the ascension of Jesus Christ, **marked with the corruption of Christian doctrine by Greek and other philosophies**, and followers dividing into different ideological groups. Additionally, Mormons claim the martyrdom of the Apostles led to a **loss of Priesthood authority** to administer the church and its ordinances. Mormons believe that God re-established the early Christian church as found in the New Testament through Joseph Smith. In particular, Mormons believe that angels such as Peter, James, John, and John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and others and bestowed various Priesthood authorities on them. **Mormons believe that their church is the “only true and living church” because of the divine authority restored through Smith, and that Smith and his successors are modern prophets who receive revelation from God to guide the church.**  
[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)
- **Now look at their writings**



## Began with a vision of Joseph Smith

- My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right—and which I should join. **I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in His sight; that those professors were all corrupt;** that “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men: having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”

• Joseph Smith, History Of The Church



## Brigham Young, 2<sup>nd</sup> leader of the Church

He did send His angel to this same obscure person, Joseph Smith jun., who afterwards became a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, and informed him that **he should not join any of the religious sects of the day, for they were all wrong;** that they were following the precepts of men instead of the Lord Jesus; that He had a work for him to perform, inasmuch as he should prove faithful before Him.



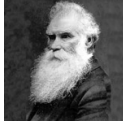
..the time came when Paganism was engrafted into Christianity, and at last Christianity was converted into Paganism rather than converting the Pagans. And subsequently the **Priesthood was taken from among men, this authority was re-called into the heavens, and the world was left without the Priesthood—without the power of God—without the Church and Kingdom of God.**

Brigham Young, *Journal Of Discourses*

## Orson Pratt, one of the first 12 Apostles

- But as **there has been no Christian Church on the earth for a great many centuries** past, until the present century, the people have lost sight of the pattern that God has given according to which the Christian Church should be established, . . . This great apostasy commenced about the close of the first century of the Christian era, and it has been waxing worse and worse from then until now. . . . After the Church of Christ fled from earth to heaven, what was left? **A set of wicked Apostates, murderers, and idolaters no Apostle, Prophet, or Revelator to inquire of God for them: and thus, because of wickedness, the Church, and Priesthood, and gifts, and ordinances and blessings of the everlasting Gospel, were taken from the earth, and reserved in heaven until the fullness of times,** when it was predicted that they should again be restored among men to continue until the end should come.

Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses



## Serious challenges (only part of theology, but foundational)

- If they were true, the Mormon church would make sense—only logical choice
- Their zeal to convert people from other churches understandable
- Let's then look more closely on the assumptions of the Great Apostasy to see if they are true
  - Corruption of the church
    - Is total apostasy possible?
    - Greek corruptions
  - No Apostles, No priesthood, No revelator to speak God's words therefore no Authority
  - Use for our study:
    - Bible—accepted by the Mormons as scripture
    - History



## Is total Apostasy of the church possible?

- **What does the Bible say about the church?**
- **Acts 20:28** *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. **Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.***
- Does the blood of Christ lose its power?
- Did Jesus die for a temporary church?
- Is there anything, anywhere in the Bible that foretold total Apostasy?
  - Always a remnant. . . no matter what the wickedness



## Not us, but Christ who keeps the church

- **Colossians 1:17-20**  
**He (Jesus) is before all things, and in him all things hold together.** And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
- **Ephesians 1:18-23**  
I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for **the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**
- **Cannot divorce the Church from Jesus**
- **Jesus "holds all things together"**



## What then about errors in the church?

- Always error
  - Revelations 2,3 great examples of errors in the church, challenges to change  
*"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent." Rev. 3:19*
  - God doesn't desert us and take the church away to heaven
- Bible always needed as a measure
- Biblical pattern, using Bible as standard
  - Discern between truth and error
  - Present truth, challenge to change
  - God disciples, he never forsakes
- Hebrews 12: 5-7 *My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children.*



## Specifically Greek, gnostic errors

- Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies d.202*
- Wrote detailed critiques of gnostic errors
- Persists today, Gospel of Thomas, Di Vinci Code, much popular religion
- See previous lesson



## Challenge of no priesthood

- **1 Peter 2:9-10** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*
- Rev. 1:5-6 *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen*
- Priests are not a special, set apart group, but all believers
- Great responsibility for each one of us—you represent Jesus—you are an ambassador, a mediator



## Apostles were the foundation, not continuing leaders

- **Ephesians 2:19-22** Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.



## Explanations of the Apostolic foundation

- When we confess that the church is apostolic, we are confessing that the churches to which we belong today stand in direct continuity to the church we see in the book of Acts. It is not the formal structure of the church that endures, nor do we need to trace an unbroken line of popes from Peter down to the present day. But it does mean that the Gospel Jesus gave to His apostles is the same Gospel we preach today.
- **Kim Riddlebarger**, *Tabletalk*, Ligonier Ministries.
- What then were the apostles? It is plain from the divine record that they were men immediately commissioned by Christ to make a full and authoritative revelation of His religion; to organize the church; to furnish it with officers and laws, and to start it on its career of conquest through the world... The apostles, the twelve, stand out just as conspicuous as an isolated body in the history of the church, without predecessors, and without successors, as Christ Himself does. They disappear from history. The title, the thing itself, the gifts, the functions, all ceased when John, the last of the twelve, ascended to heaven.
  - **Charles Hodge**, *What is Presbyterianism?* p. 53, 60.
- Apostles were chosen by God to work in the founding and forming of the church, after which time apostleship ceased. When all the apostles had died, the office of apostle no longer existed. They were selected, sent and empowered by God for that period in the history of the church, which was over when their lives were over. As the human founders and foundation of the church, the apostles had particular purposes and responsibilities.
  - **John MacArthur**, *1 Corinthians*, Moody, 1984.

## Christian quotes



Beloved, if it had been possible to destroy the church of God on earth, it would have been destroyed long ago.  
*Charles Spurgeon*



"Let him who wants a true church cling to the Word by which everything is upheld."  
*Martin Luther*



Hold firmly that our faith is identical with that of the ancients. Deny this, and you dissolve the unity of the Church.  
*Thomas Aquinas*



Hypocrites in the Church? Yes, and in the lodge and at the home. Don't hunt through the Church for a hypocrite. Go home and look in the mirror. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less.  
*Billy Sunday*

## Walter Martin's summary

With one "Special Revelation" the Mormon Church expects its intended convert to accept the totally unsupported testimony of a fifteen-year-old boy that nobody ever preached Jesus Christ's gospel from the close of the apostolic age until the "Restoration" through Joseph Smith Jr., beginning in 1820! We are asked to believe that the church fathers for the first five centuries did not proclaim the true gospel—that Origen, Justin, Irenaeus, Jerome, Eusebius, Athanasius, Chrysostom and later Thomas Aquinas, Huss, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Tyndale, Wycliffe, Knox, Wesley, Whitefield, and a vast army of faithful servants of Jesus Christ all failed where Joseph Smith Jr. was to succeed!

With one dogmatic assertion, Joseph pronounced everybody wrong, all Christian theology an abomination, and all professing Christians corrupt—all in the name of God! How strange for this to be presented as restored Christianity, when Jesus Christ specifically promised that "the gates of Hell" would not prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18)! In Mormonism we find God contradicting this statement in a vision to Joseph Smith, Jr., some eighteen centuries later!



## Conclusion

- There is no biblical or historical evidence for the Great Apostasy as described by Joseph Smith
- The "Great Restoration" of the Mormon Church was not necessary
- Because—  
Jesus Christ is the Savior and Sustainer of His Church



*To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*  
Jude 24, 25

## Discussion Questions

- Go around the group, give your name and a favorite football-watching food.
- What is the Mormon view of the Great Apostasy?
- What can you say in answer to:
  - That the Christian church has no authority because it has no living Apostles?
  - That the Christian faith was so corrupt God took the true church away until Joseph Smith restored it?
- What is the true Biblical way God deals with us when we sin?