

HOW TO WITNESS TO MORMONS

Our Philosophy of Ministry

By Eli Brayley

There are basically two ways Christians witness to Mormons. One is to demolish Mormonism in an *apologetic* way, the other is to expose Mormonism in a *theological* way. The former deals with Mormon history, false prophecies, archaeology, DNA, etc. The latter deals with sin, repentance, atonement, the gospel, etc. Most people take the first approach, but we, the Oasis ministry in Utah, take the second. The first may make many ex-Mormons, but it doesn't necessarily make believers. Actually, it can be counter-productive. Once Mormons realize Mormonism is false they typically move into atheism because it is almost impossible for them to disassociate their knowledge of God, the Bible and Jesus from their Mormon worldview. They are so wounded from having been lied to that they hesitate to trust any religious consideration afterward and default into heavy skepticism. Also, destroying the historical foundations of Mormonism isn't preaching the gospel. The message we are called to preach is the same message for all people whether they are Mormon or not: we are called to preach Christ crucified, the only salvation for sinners. Apologetics are certainly useful in destroying people's confidence in Mormonism as a valid historical religion, but the most important thing is that Mormons come to place their confidence in Jesus Christ as the only sufficient Savior from their sins. Often, these two goals conflict with each other. Therefore, the approach we believe is the best way to witness to Mormons is the theological approach: to elucidate the Biblical message of sin, righteousness and faith *by challenging Mormonism on its own theological ground*. People do not need correct Christian doctrine to realize that they are sinners... they need it to solve that problem! Walking Mormons through their own doctrinal system to its logical conclusions will show to the Mormons that they are sinners, and will reveal to them the impossibility of being justified before God by their works, opening the door to share with them the true gospel of grace. Besides all this, the first approach almost always leads to an argument where the Mormon feels persecuted and attacked, making the wall go up even more.

Probing Mormonism theologically forces the Mormon to dig deep for real answers. No petty arguments will satisfy difficult theological problems within their own "gospel". As they dig, they discover, not only that they have no answers, but also that their spiritual condition is much worse than they thought. Few Mormons have ever thought deeply through their own theology, as their religion wisely discourages. In a friendly way, we seek to give them the opportunity.

The means we use to go about doing this is the *Socratic method*: asking questions. Mormons love talking about their religion... they want to evangelize you! So let them! Ask them what their message is... why is there a gospel... what is the problem that the gospel addresses... etc... etc... etc. As they respond, think of related questions to ask that will help them reflect upon their answers. Don't worry if you aren't very good at this at

first. Using the Socratic method will become more natural as you practice talking with Mormons on a regular basis. As well, we shouldn't need to have a pre-packaged cookie-cutter conversation with them, because that is what *they* do. Mormons are trained to speak the same things as if from a script, but we should come in the opposite spirit, as Jesus taught His disciples (Luke 21:14-15). *We don't have to be experts on Mormonism, but we should be experts on the gospel.* If we grasp the basic concepts of the gospel and rely on the Spirit for words, we'll be able to witness to any person from any religion at any time. We don't need to worry about every question or word to be planned. This allows for each conversation to be unique.

There must be a direction and a goal to which this questioning ultimately leads. The point, or goal, when using the Socratic method on Mormonism's theological system, is to bring the Mormon to the place of seeing that *Mormonism's plan of salvation does not save him.* The place of ultimate tension surrounds the **atonement**: this will be the climax of the conversation and it is here that the heart of the spiritual battle will be waged. Mormons acknowledge that Jesus made atonement for our sins so that we could be forgiven in order to return to God. It is *not* necessary to address all the weird doctrines they hold (like the nature of God or that they believe the atonement was made in the Garden of Gethsemane) because the point is to show them how Mormonism *itself*, in all its weirdness, does not save. We will get to those things eventually, but for now it does not serve our purpose to go into them, and will likely only hinder our objective. When I am witnessing to Mormons, if they make a remark about some weird point of doctrine, I usually just say nothing, neither affirmative nor negative, but move on with the goal of the conversation.

The one great question is: "*How* does a person receive the atonement?" Since a person's eternal destiny hangs upon this one question, then the answer is of infinite importance. It is at this point that Mormonism fails.

When it all boils down, Mormon doctrine teaches that a person must utterly forsake all of his or her sins in order to receive the atonement. This, of course, is impossible. Their primary manual, *Gospel Principles*, reads: "We accept Christ's atonement by repenting of our sins, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and obeying all the commandments. In this way we are cleansed from sin and become worthy to return and live forever with our Heavenly Father... Christ did his part to atone for our sins. Each of us must repent and obey to make Christ's atonement effective in our lives." (*Gospel Principles*, p. 50-51, 1978) According to Mormonism, the forgiveness of sins is not a free gift purchased by Christ *for* the individual, but something that the individual must *earn* through personal worthiness by obedience to the commandments of God. In Contrast, the Bible teaches that eternal life is the free gift of God for sinful men. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8-9) This vital disparity between grace and works is the main point of contrast and conflict between Biblical Christianity and Mormonism and it is *this* that must be addressed. It is not necessary to discuss baptism or receiving the Holy Ghost (even though Mormons may wish to get sidetracked on these or other like issues) because according to Mormonism *repentance* must first precede all things. A

person must *be* worthy to even be baptized: “All those who have *truly repented of all their sins* shall be received by baptism into his church.” (D&C 20:37) Nothing comes for nothing in Mormonism. Even “faith” is described as: “having such trust in Christ that we obey whatever he commands.” (*Gospel Principles*, p. 118) In Mormonism, the *individual’s worthiness* through *works* is clearly the entire matter.

If Mormonism were true, that we “accept Christ’s atonement by repenting of our sins...”, then two obvious questions arise out of this “gospel”: 1) *what is repentance?* And 2) *how good do I have to be to be worthy enough to receive the atonement?* As we dig, we shall see how patently impossible it is for Mormonism to save anybody.

One must only look to the official church manuals in order to get into the Mormon mindset and understand how they define their terms. This paragraph from the chapter entitled “Repentance” in *Gospel Principles*, which includes a quote from the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, gives us the explanation: “It does little good to admit that we have sinned if we do not *stop* doing the evil thing. If we truly repent of our sins, we will do them *no more*. If a person has stolen, he will steal *no more*. If he has lied, he will lie *no more*. If he committed adultery, he will *stop* this evil practice. The Lord said to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins – behold, he will confess them and *forsake* them.” (*Gospel Principles*, p. 91, 1978) Spencer Kimball, the late President of the Mormon Church stated: “There is one crucial test of repentance. This is *abandonment* of the sin... the saving power does not extend to him who merely wants to change his life... nor is repentance complete when one merely tries to abandon sin... to ‘try’ is weak. To ‘do the best I can’ is not strong. We must always do better than we can.” (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p. 163-165) The Mormon definition of repentance is to actually and permanently forsake one’s sin. Therefore, according to their own doctrine, in order for a Mormon to accept the atonement and receive the forgiveness of sins, he or she must completely come to an end of sinning and keep the commandments of God. It’s very simple: If you don’t repent of your sins, you don’t receive the atonement. There is no “try”.

The devastating blow that eliminates all the Mormon’s excuses for not doing so (and there will be excuses) comes from one of the most cardinal doctrines of their theological system. That is: *that God never gives a command that we cannot keep, no matter how difficult or how great*. “For I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.” (1 Nephi 3:7) Therefore, when God commands us to “deny ourselves of *all* ungodliness” (Moroni 10:32) and to “repent of *all* our sin” (Helaman 14:13), we are well able to do it. If we don’t do it, we are to blame, not God. There is no legitimate reason why a person does not keep all the commandments all the time in Mormonism. Some Mormons are right now struggling intensely with this very problem. Many others have never connected the dots and still think that as long as they just “try their best” they will be fine. They have conveniently forgotten that to the God of Mormonism, a person’s best *is* perfection. By asking the right questions and by helping them connect the dots, they will be forced to admit that they have no excuse for their willful rebellion (the Biblical answer as to *why* men do not obey the commandments).

The Mormon “gospel” is a hopeless hamster wheel: All have sinned and so the atonement was given. However, *to get* the atonement we must not sin. Therefore no person, past, present or future, has, or will ever have, the atonement. Wasn’t the atonement given because we couldn’t keep the commandments? Why then would the condition be to receive the atonement, ‘Keep the commandments’? We had already proven that that was impossible! Thus it is that Mormonism does not save. *“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”* (Galatians 2:21)

At this point, those whose consciences are sensitive will be distraught by their sin. Others, whose consciences are less sensitive, may become uneasy and bear to you their testimony. Mormons are under intense pressure to earn God’s grace, so the realization that they have not succeeded in securing it can often be very troubling. As the Bible teaches, the commandments were given by God to *overwhelm* the sinner so that he would *despair* of all hope in his own self and in his own works, *constraining* him to flee to Christ that he might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). This is what we are seeking to do, using the law, Mormon style. Many have sought to alleviate that pressure by lowering the standard to a safe artificial level, but as instruments in the Redeemer’s hands we are to raise that standard to its true and terrifying place and lay the pressure on. Our temptation will be to hold back and not make people uncomfortable over their sin (a false concern for man), but in reality the most caring thing that we can possibly do for people is to speak the truth in love, even when it isn’t popular (a true concern for man). A doctor must first tell his patients the bad news before he will be able to convince them to submit to his treatments. The Mormon’s *eternal soul* is at stake, and he does not know that he is perishing. Therefore we must, for love’s sake, be willing to make him uncomfortable that he might be brought to Jesus Christ for salvation. Once he sees the futility of his own theology, and he asks, “Well, how *do* you get the atonement?!” then the door will be open for you to share the true gospel of the grace of God with him and you’ll have quite a “sponge” of an audience. This is the place to declare the truth clearly and cuttingly, proclaiming the difference between Mormon and Christian salvation. They need to hear the *real* good news. Truly, Mormons are dying for want of grace.

As for your demeanor when you speak with them, be sensitive, meek and kind, for they expect that all non-Mormons, especially Christians, are out to persecute them. You will thoroughly bewilder them if you drive the sword of truth into their conscience with meekness. It is very easy to get frustrated with Mormons because they are so blind and cannot see the blatantly obvious, but if you picture them in your mind to be wearing dark glasses and holding in their hands white canes, it will help you to not become frustrated but rather will move you to compassion. Nearly all Mormons were born into the lie and have been conditioned to believe it from their childhood, knowing nothing else.

Being open and honest about your sins is as refreshing as cold water to Mormons, for theirs is a culture of extreme hypocrisy and judgmentalism. This is because they are anxiously striving to look good before men and to appear to all that they are keeping the commandments (after all, that is how they believe they are right with God). If you are real with them and honest about your own sins, it will help them be real with you and

honest about their sins... a thing most rare. If you aren't real, Mormons can spot a hypocrite a mile away! (It takes one to know one, right?)

Nor should you be discouraged when it looks as if a conversation has been in vain. Mormons are very good at hiding their true feelings and you never know when the Spirit of God is convicting and drawing an individual to Himself. There are so many stories of people who have been brought to Christ while all along the Christians who had witnessed to them had no idea that their words were making any difference. Therefore, never give up!

These are the principles that we have found to be the most effective when sharing the gospel with Mormons. *It's a theological approach which uses the Socratic method to show the impossibility of Mormonism, opening the door to share the true gospel of grace.* Unlike the apologetic approach, this approach bypasses the pitfalls of atheism, almost always prevents them from feeling persecuted, and is thoroughly based upon the message of Christ crucified. The principles shown here extend far beyond Mormonism, for Mormonism is just one branch on the tree of self-righteousness. As stated before, we don't need to be experts on Mormonism, but we should be experts on the gospel.

Recommended Resources:

Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons by Mark Cares
All of Grace by Charles Spurgeon
God's Way of Peace by Horatius Bonar
The Soul Winner by Charles Spurgeon
Principles of War by Jim Wilson
The Dynamic of Service by A. Paget Wilkes
One Thing You Can't Do In Heaven by Mark Cahill
The Way of the Master by Ray Comfort
The Law Established Through Faith - CD by Eli Brayley*
Is Faith a Work? - article by Eli Brayley *

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