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“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” 2 Timothy 2:15

Understanding Mormonism: Week 1

As we begin this study it is helpful to understand the background to religion. Religion being man’s efforts to relate to God through beliefs, cultural systems and world view.

The Bible first introduces us to religion in Genesis 4:1-9 and the story of Cain and Abel.

1. V4-Notice that the Lord *respected* Abel and his offering. Abel had acted out of obedience and humility concerning what God had instructed him. God gazed or looked upon (received) Abel’s offering.
2. V5- The Lord did not look upon, receive, Cain’s offering. Cain was offering what he believed he could offer rather than responding to God’s word through obedience and humility.

In regards to confusion concerning the Word of God let’s not forget the influence of Satan. The devil’s desire is to mislead us, confuse us, and direct us toward human efforts. He wants us to move away from God rather than obey God. A technique frequently used is to get you to doubt the Word of God.

1. Genesis 3:1-5 We see the demonic technique of casting doubt on the Word of God.
2. Matthew 4:1-11 Here the devil tries to manipulate the Word of God and tempt Jesus into sin.

Religious efforts always speak of God but the emphasis is upon what man can or must do in order to be right with God.

Let’s now look at how Jesus dealt with the religiously charged people of His day. How did Jesus handle those who misrepresented God and misinterpreted His Word? To do this let’s consider two types of religious people:

1. The contentious (or self-righteous): Luke 5:17-26
 - a. Power is there to heal (v17) and yet they would not look and see who Jesus was.
 - b. Jesus is aware of their animosity yet engages with them.
 - c. He knew most would not listen to Him, yet He spoke respectfully and directly.
 - d. In spite of criticism Jesus stayed true to His purpose: *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.* Luke 19:10
 - i. Purpose- Seek and save
 - ii. Desire- That people would be rescued; saved from eternal separation
 - iii. Delivery- Talked to them not at them. Many Jews, even some of the Sanhedrin responded to Jesus and were saved.
 - e. Those who were contentious He engaged, planted thoughts, revealed truth but did not get drawn into debate! (additionally: Matt. 12:2,15:2,Mark 2:6-8, 3:1-6, Lk 5:30, 13:10-17)

2. The confused: John 4:19-26- Jesus speaks to the woman and she brings up a “religious” question.
 - a. John 4:4-42 She was confused and He brought truth and hope.

With the ‘contentious’ or the ‘confused’ notice how Jesus engaged with them:

1. **Respect**- Jesus’ respected the religious people of His day; their customs in the Synagogue, their position within society. He did not ‘regard’ or hold their opinion up but He respected them as people. This is not easy to do but it is essential if you are to have a healthy dialogue.
 - i. Does not mean condone (overlook) or compromise.
 - ii. Know when to listen and when to speak Jesus often asked questions when speaking to religious people.
 - iii. True respect will lovingly address differences.
 1. It’s not a debate! Jesus was not out to win a doctrinal debate, He was out to reveal the truth so that the truth would set them free. (John 8:32)
 2. PRAY- For God to direct your thoughts and the conversation so you can maintain respect and begin to address critical differences.
 - a. Recognize His timing and His work in your heart and the person you are speaking with. (check your motives)
2. **Refute**-*to prove to be false*. Using the Bible as the final authority and common ground one can examine the teachings and doctrines of the LDS and see how they compare.
 - i. Common ground- KJV Bible. This is accepted as scripture with the LDS although it is not considered to be ‘final authority’.
 - ii. LDS teaching and beliefs should not contradict what is clearly stated in the Bible
 - iii. Avoid secondary topics, stick with important issues:
 1. Who God is?
 2. Who Jesus is?
 3. How can a person be saved? Who can be saved? (What does it mean to be saved?)
3. **Reveal**-When falsehood is shown it is important to identify truth. You do not want to leave them in a cloud of uncertainty or confusion.
 - i. Show them what the Bible says; turn to chapter and verse and have them do the same.
 - ii. Ask them to read the verse.
 - iii. Avoid ‘secondary’ issues, and ‘diversionary’ questions. You will often have missionaries ‘answer a question with a question’. This enables them to redirect the conversation and bring up a more comfortable topic or text.

Relevant topics; Discuss the critical differences:

1. Who is God?
 - a. BIBLE-Monotheism-
 1. Deut. 4:35 *It was shown to you so that you might know that Jehovah is God, and no one else beside Him.*
 2. Isaiah 44:6 *So says Jehovah, the King of Israel, and His redeemer Jehovah of Hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and besides Me there is no God...*
 3. 1 John 5:7 *For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and*

these three are one.

- b. LDS-Polytheism (henotheistic- A form of polytheism that stresses worship of a central deity)
 - 1. “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost- comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of Gods exist. To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only Gods we worship. But in addition there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods.” (*Mormon Doctrine* by Bruce R. McConkie, Plurality of Gods pp. 576-577)
- c. BIBLE- God is eternal; always has been always will be the same:
 - 1. Psalm 90:2 *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.* Consider also; Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:9, Numbers 23:19, Isaiah 40:28
- d. LDS- God is an exalted man:
 - 1. “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!...” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* by Joseph Fielding Smith, pp. 345-346)
 - 2. “As man is God once was, as God is man may be.” (Lorenzo Snow, 5th president of the LDS organization)
- e. LDS teach that through eternal progression God went from a spirit being to a man to a God. Furthermore they teach that man can progress just as God has. Clearly this is a different God than the God of the Bible and a false teaching concerning the nature of God and the potential of mankind. God did not progress from a man and man will never progress to be a God! Bible- *God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* (John 4:24)
- f. LDS- “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s..” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22)
 - 1. Within the belief that the Father has flesh and bones the LDS also believe that the Father had sexual relations with Mary and Jesus was conceived. Denying the clear teaching of the Bible (Matthew 1:20, Luke 1:31,35) the LDS believe, “When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost.” (Journal of Discourses, Vol.1 pg.50, Brigham Young). Brigham Young repeated this belief in greater detail and his discourse is recorded in vol.8, pg.115.

Perhaps the most disturbing assertion came from one of the original LDS apostles, Orson Pratt, when he said the following, “Therefore, the Father and Mother of Jesus, according to the flesh, must have been associated together in the capacity of Husband and wife; hence the Virgin Mary must have been, for the time being, the lawful wife of God the Father;... Inasmuch as God was the first husband to her, it may be that He only gave her to be the wife of Joseph while in this mortal state, and that He intended after the resurrection to again take her as one of

his own wives to raise up immortal spirits in eternity.” (Seer, 1853, pg 158)

This is not an ‘exhaustive’ list rather just a scratching of the surface to reveal what is underneath. It is easily seen that the God of the LDS is not the God of the Bible!

Next week we will look at the differences between Jesus of the Bible and the Jesus of the LDS. Our goal in all of this is to live out what Jesus said concerning truth; *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”* John 8:31, 32