

17 POINTS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints prints a small card that is normally entitled “Seventeen points of the True Church”. At times the front of the card will read “Does it meet the Test?” Whatever the form, many Christians have been handed this card. What of its claims? Are the 17 listed points true? Do the claims made by the LDS Church stand the test of the Bible?

This information sheet will examine, briefly, the claims made by this little card. It is not intended to be an in-depth doctrinal treatise on each point, as the card hardly attempts to be, either. Instead, it is meant to give the Christian reader more background into just what the Mormon Church is claiming, and how this does not in any way reflect the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles as recorded in the Word of God, the Bible. We will follow the outline of the card itself. (Some cards list more or fewer points. This card seems to be the most prevalent).

1. **Christ organized the Church. Ephesians 4:11-14.** This is true. However, we might ask our Mormon friends, since Ephesians 4:11 lists evangelists and pastors, where are these “offices” in the LDS Church? Since “apostles” in the original Greek language refers simply to a “sent one,” does it not make sense to understand this to refer to missionaries, the very ones who, like Paul, and Apollos, spread the word concerning Christ throughout the entire known world? Should we not also point out that the very same book here quoted (Ephesians) also says in chapter 3, verse 21, that God would receive glory “in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end?” How does this square with the Mormon teaching that the Church of Jesus Christ disappeared after only a few years?

2. **The true church must bear the name of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:23.** Exactly how Ephesians 5:23 relates to this is difficult to say. At any rate, the point normally made by Mormons in regard to this is that the name on the letterhead of your church must include the phrase “Jesus Christ”. Just how official names are involved in saving someone is again not clear. Biblically, the Church is called the Church of Christ. It is also called the Body of Christ. Does that mean we should make sure the phrase “Body of Christ” is on our letterheads, also? Or is it more consistent to see that the Church as it is expressed universally is the Church of Christ, and the local assembly takes the name that would best describe it - such at the Church at Rome, the Church of the Thessalonians, the Church at Philippi? The Bible nowhere commands us to attach a specific name to our local congregation. Christians are Christians whether they worship in the same building and in the exact same manner or not.

3. **The true church must have a foundation of Apostles and Prophets. Ephesians 2:19-20.** This, again, is true, as far as it goes. Unfortunately, the LDS Church takes it too far. The Mormons takes this to mean that the true church must have official positions entitled “Apostle” and “Prophet”, which, of course, they have. This is not what Ephesians 2:19-20 teaches. First, the context includes verses 21 and 22, and these must be read also. The text actually says that the church is **built** on a foundation. Stop there. The word “built” as translated in the King James Version translates the Greek participle **epoikodomethentes**, which, properly syntaxed is translated “having been built”. It is an aorist passive participle. It refers to a past action, one that (in this case) has been completed. To say that today we must continue to build **the foundation** of apostles and prophets is to mis-understand the text.

Next, we would like to point out that the Bible identifies Jesus Christ as the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). The Church is built **upon** this foundation, and is continually growing unto an “holy temple in the Lord”. The question must be asked, how many times does one lay a foundation? If one is continually laying a foundation, how will the house be built? The answer is obvious. The Mormon Church is still trying to lay a foundation that was laid two thousand years ago. Since this is so, it is obvious to see that in this passage Paul is referring to something other than a continuing office of apostle and prophet.

The phrase “of the apostles and prophets” is in a genitive construction that can easily give the sense that the foundation of the apostles and prophets is Jesus Christ Himself. This would be completely consistent with Paul’s use of themelios (foundation) in other letters. Again we see how examining the actual text of the Bible we can avoid errors such as the kind propagated by the Mormon Church.

One final thing. In the lists of “offices” in the church (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:28), the “apostles” are placed before the “prophets.” Aside from the fact that there were obviously many “prophets” in the Church (rather than the one of the LDS Church), it is clear that the Mormon hierarchy of Prophet then Apostles is backwards, at least Biblically speaking. It is also plain to see that “apostles” (literally, “sent ones”) and “prophets” functioned quite differently than the LDS Church believes they did.

4. The true church must have the same organization as Christ’s Church. Ephesians 4:11-14. This point overlaps with the discussion given above. We have already pointed out that the organization the Mormon Church has forced upon the Bible is not an accurate understanding of just how the ancient church was organized. As examples of this have already been brought up, we will move on to the next point.

5. The true church must claim divine authority. Hebrews 5:4-10. The Christian Church does claim divine authority, for each and every believer, male or female, is a king and priest unto God (Revelation 1:6). However, again the LDS Church has forced its own theology upon the Scriptures instead of allowing the Bible to be the guide. Mormon leaders claim to have divine authority in that they have the “Melchizedek Priesthood”. Younger men are called to the “Aaronic Priesthood”, and at age 18 they can receive the Melchizedek Priesthood. Though space does not allow a complete discussion of the topic of the priesthoods, it should be pointed out that the Mormon doctrine falls short of the truth at a number of points:

A) It ignores the fact that there is no distinction made between male and female in their relationship with Christ. This is not to say that in the home God does not ordain a certain order, as He obviously does. However, to claim the stupendous things that the Mormon Church does for its “priesthood” and yet deny those privileges to women (and blacks for 148 years) is certainly outside Biblical teaching.

B) It ignores the fact that the Aaronic priesthood was fulfilled and done away with at the cross of Calvary. When Christ died, the veil in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The function of Aaronic priests, that of making animal sacrifices and, once a year, going through the veil to offer the atonement for the nation, was finished for all time. The intermediacy of a priesthood was done away with because of the immediate access each believer has to the throne of grace through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. To re-establish an organized, intermediate priesthood as the LDS Church has done, when God has done away with it at the cross, is nothing short of blasphemous! Though it is truly amazing to anyone who has studied the New Testament book of Hebrews, Joseph Smith once wrote, “...it is generally supposed that sacrifice was entirely done away when the Great Sacrifice [i.e., the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus] was offered up, and that there will be no necessity for the ordinance of sacrifice in the future: but those who assert this are certainly not acquainted with the duties, privileges and authority of the priesthood... These sacrifices, as well as every ordinance belonging to the Priesthood, will, when the Temple of the Lord shall be built, and the sons of Levi purified, be fully restored and attended to in all their powers, ramifications, and blessings.” (**Documentary History of the Church**, volume 4 page 211). Again we see the depth of error that can be attained by ignoring the Biblical teachings on a subject.

C) It ignores the Biblical fact that there is but one High Priest (the Mormon Church has many), and only one worthy to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, that being Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:24-25). To claim to hold that priesthood is an affront to the person of the Son of God.

6. The true church must have no paid ministry. Isaiah 45:13 and 1 Peter 5:2. The reader is asked to examine the two references given to gain yet another example of out-of-context reading. Neither passage has anything to do with paid or unpaid ministers. One has to do with Cyrus, king of Persia, and the other with the motivation of the heart of the minister. Also note that the sections of the New Testament that directly address this issue are ignored. Paul clearly taught that a minister had the right to pay in return for his work (1 Corinthians 9:1-14). Paul calls it a “right” of the minister to reap material benefit from those who receive spiritual leadership. It might be pointed out that the leadership of the LDS Church in Salt Lake certainly do not live unrewarded. How does this square with

their teaching?

7. The true church must baptize by immersion. Matthew 3:13-16. We agree. Again, however, the LDS Church goes beyond what is written and adds to this the ideas that

A) baptism is for remission of sins (when Jesus was baptized, was it for remission of sins? We are forgiven of our sins because of the blood of Christ, not the water of a baptistry, 1 Peter 1:18-21), and

B) that the only persons “authorized” to baptize are those who hold the “Aaronic” priesthood. This error has already been discussed in 5 above.

8. The true church must bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. Acts 8:14-17. Aside from the fact that it is Holy Spirit, not Holy Ghost, it must be pointed out that again the LDS Church is ignoring the majority witness of Scripture. Laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit occurs only three times in the New Testament: Acts 8:17 as a sign of unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers, Acts 9:17 as an identification of Saul, and Acts 19:6 where the baptism they had undergone was not Christian baptism but the baptism of John. In the vast majority of cases no mention is made of any special ceremony of laying on of hands being necessary for the Holy Spirit to come upon someone. Laying on of hands does show unity and support of an individual, and as such there is nothing wrong with it. But the Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit comes into a person’s life at the point of conversion (Romans 8:9, Acts 10:44-48), not at some secondary time later on. If this were not so, then Romans 8:9 would be false, as it identifies the Holy Spirit as that which makes a person Christ’s. (see also Ephesians 1:10-14).

9. The true church must practice divine healing. Mark 3:14-15. One of the gifts of the Spirit is that of healing (1 Corinthians 12:28). Of course, not all have this gift (v. 29). The actual operation of the gift is seen to be a corollary to prayer, as the special gift of touching someone was of apostolic authority, not present today. We have seen many people healed through the power of prayer in the Christian church, as God still is the great physician, and He still works miracles. However, to claim to have God on a string, and have Him in your control so as to be able to heal anyone, is not Biblical. Even the great apostle Paul had to pray that a close friend would not die, as his gift was for particular uses, not personal gain (Philippians 2:25-30, 2 Timothy 4:20).

10. The true church must teach that God and Jesus Christ are separate and distinct individuals. John 17:11 and John 20:17. The true church must first teach that there is one true God. The number of passages that teach this is astounding. Just for an example see Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, 6:4, 32:39, 1 Chronicles 16:25-26, 2 Samuel 7:22 (1 Chronicles 17:20), Psalm 86:10, Isaiah 43:10, 44:6-8, 44:24, 45:5-6, 46:9, John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 and so on, and so on. Mormonism teaches that there are many, many Gods, while God denies any such thing (Isaiah 44:8). Hence, Mormonism is off track right from the start. This is the most basic revelation of God, and when one misses it, nothing after that will make any sense. It is true that the Father is not the Son nor is the Son the Father. As far as the above statement reflects this, it is true. However, the Mormon viewpoint is that the Father and Son are two separate and distinct individuals, and hence two separate and distinct gods! (see **Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith**, page 370). This is completely contradicted by the Bible, and is based upon the error of polytheism. Mormons cannot understand the Christian doctrine of the Trinity because they reject the Bible’s teaching of monotheism (one God).

11. The true church must teach that God and Jesus Christ have bodies of flesh and bone. Luke 24:36-39 and Acts 1:9-11. Here the Mormons take two references to the fact that Jesus Christ became flesh (John 1:14) and infer from them that God the Father also has a body of flesh and bone. What does God say about this? “You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes” (Psalm 50:21, NASB). “... for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee...” (Hosea 11:9). “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent.” (Numbers 23:19). Instead, Jesus taught that God was spirit (John

4:24). God is not limited to time and space as we are, but rather is eternal (Psalm 90:2), unchanging (Malachi 3:6), and omnipresent (Jeremiah 23:24, 2 Chronicles 6:18). What Mormons need to realize is that the gospel is not that man can become God, but that God became a man.

12. The officers must be called by God. Hebrews 5:4, Exodus 28:1, and Exodus 40:13-16. As the Old Testament passages here quoted have little to do with the New Testament Church, we will look at Hebrews 5:4 (which also has little to do with the subject at hand, but its closer than the others!). First, we agree that the leaders of the church should be called by God, and, in the Christian church, they are. However, again the Latter-day Saints are seen to be adding to what is written. The Mormons interpret this within their framework of “priesthood authority”, again leading to error. It might be asked whether their Aaronic priests are called in the same way as was Aaron? A quick look at Exodus chapter 29 and Leviticus chapter 8 will reveal that they certainly are not!

13. The true church must claim revelation from God. Amos 3:7. This position can only be maintained by ignoring what comes after Amos 3:7. Luke 16:16 says “The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached...” The New Testament presents a very different picture. Jesus Christ, the final and complete revelation of God (Hebrews 1:1-3) has made “further revelation” obsolete and unnecessary. To claim to have such a “revelation” is to say that Jesus really wasn’t what and who He said He was, and who the Bible describes Him as being. In actuality, it is the simple fact that Mormonism’s teachings cannot be supported from the Bible that drives the leadership to find another source of authority. Everything that has ever claimed to be “further revelation” has failed the test of Scripture, including the **Book of Mormon**, the **Doctrine and Covenants** and the **Pearl of Great Price**.

14. The true church must be a missionary church. Matthew 28:19-20. We heartily agree at this point, and are forced to ask why it is that the Mormon Church has thrived on taking people from other churches rather than trailblazing into unknown areas, as the Christian church has done for hundreds of years?

15. The true church must be a restored church. Acts 3:19-20. An examination of the text chosen to represent this claim will show just how weak this argument is. Acts chapter 3 is not in any way discussing the Church. This is seen in two ways. First, verse 21 says that the “restitution of all things” was “spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” As Paul points out in Colossians 1:25-27, the mystery of the church was not made known to the past ages and generations (see also 1 Peter 1:10-12), hence this certainly is not talking about the church. Second, the prophets spoke of the restoration of Israel to its own land, and the restoration of the theocracy under David’s Son. This is what Peter is discussing in Acts 3. Besides all of this, we must ask when it was that Christ returned, as verse 19 says this would happen at the “restitution of all things.” As we pointed out, the true church founded by Christ did not fail (see 2-4 above).

16. The true church must practice baptism for the dead. 1 Corinthians 15-16 and 29. The Christian church had never practiced baptism for the dead in the sense that the LDS Church wants us to believe. They are forced to take 1 Corinthians 15:29 out of its context and force their own peculiar meaning on it. First, the Bible does not teach that baptism saves anyone (even 1 Peter 3:21, upon close examination, does not do so), hence it certainly would not be needed to “redeem the dead” as Mormons put it. 1 Corinthians 15:29 is found in the “resurrection chapter”. The needed clue to its meaning is found in the language in which it was originally written, that being Greek. The word “for” is the Greek term **huper**. It refers to the taking of someone’s place, or to substitution. Baptism “for” the dead is not baptism of a living person in behalf of or for the benefit of a dead person, but rather the immersion of a living person in the place of or into the former position of a now deceased person. It is the baptism of a new convert who takes the place in the church of one who has died. The baptism of a young child, for example, the day after an elderly saint of the Lord has passed away could be viewed as the younger person coming to “fill” the position of the person who has gone home to be with the Lord. This vein of thinking is carried on in the context when Paul says in the next verse, “Why are we also in danger every hour?” (NASB). Being a Christian in those days was a dangerous business. Paul’s whole point in the entire passage has to do with the fact that if the dead are not raised (v. 12) there

is absolutely no point in bringing new converts into this dangerous position through baptism when there is no future life to promise them, no reward in the future for their faithfulness. Why not just let everyone die off without filling their positions in the church, since, if there is no resurrection, “we are of all men most to be pitied” (v. 19). Belief in baptizing the living to somehow help in saving the dead demonstrates a complete misunderstanding of the New Testament teaching concerning the nature, extent, and purpose of salvation.

17. **By their fruits ye shall know them. Matthew 7:20.** Indeed, but that is not the only test we are given, thankfully. We know people of many religions, and many of them are kind, decent, moral, loving people. Does this mean that they are all right? Of course not. At the same time, we know people of many different religions that are mean, nasty, unloving, hateful, dishonest, etc. and etc. Does that mean those religions are false? No, it doesn't. We know Mormons that fit in both the above categories. Does this prove Mormonism true or false? Neither. Instead, we are given other tests to utilize. The main one is, what do you teach concerning Jesus Christ (e.g., Colossians 2:8-9)? The Mormon Church teaches that Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer (see, for example, **Ensign**, June 1986, page 25). This is completely untrue, as the Bible says Jesus created all things (John 1:3, Colossians 1:16-17), which would include Lucifer (Ezekiel 28:13-15). Hence, how can the Creator be the spirit-brother of his creation? Such is nonsense. The fruit of this teaching is falsehood concerning the person of Jesus Christ. Again, even using the test prescribed by the LDS Church, we find Mormonism wanting.

This little card ends with, “Why are these things important? HEBREWS 13:8.” Yes, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. How different from the Mormon teaching that God was once a man who evolved (or progressed) to Godhood! Much more important than this is the dire warning of the Bible: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8-9). Those are serious words indeed, and the LDS people would do well to heed them.



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