

UNDERSTANDING MORMONISM

Week 1: Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

- Worldviews are not shopping lists of beliefs, they are webs of beliefs.



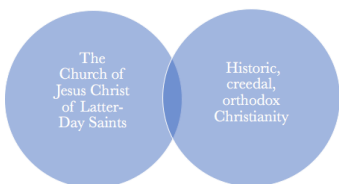
- Tinfoil is easy to crumple, but hard to uncrumple. Take time to ask questions before poking at someone's belief system.



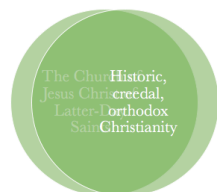
Week 2: What does it mean to be a Christian?

- Three aspects of true faith:
 - Doctrinal – what we confess to be true
 - Ethical – how we act in the world
 - Spiritual – a heart changed by God
- See these aspects throughout John's First Epistle
- We tend to see faith through the doctrinal lens first, and we see massive differences between our beliefs and those taught by the LDS church
- Our LDS friends tend to see faith through the ethical lens first, and they see massive similarities between their actions and values and ours

Doctrine



Ethics



- A fundamental similarity:
 - Both worldviews are historical. In other words, just like the orthodox Christian worldview depends on Jesus' resurrection from the dead at a specific point in history, the Mormon worldview depends on Jesus' resurrection from the dead *and* Joseph Smith's First Vision.
- A fundamental difference:
 - Orthodox Christianity claims the Bible as our sole authority for faith and practice. The LDS church does claim the Bible—that's not just something they say to try to fit in—but they also claim continuing, active revelation from God (including additional scriptures).
 - James Faulconer (LDS), writes, "The church neither has an official theology nor encourages theological conjecture. As individuals, we may find a theology helpful to our understanding, but no explanation or system of ideas will be sufficient to tell us what it means to be a Latter-day Saint. For a Latter-day Saint, a theology is always in danger of becoming meaningless because it can always be undone by new revelation."

Week 3: Foundations of Latter-day Saint Teaching, part 1

- Foundational question: "What is Prime reality—the really real?"
- The nature of God:

Restored Church (LDS)	Orthodox Christianity
Flesh & Blood	Spirit
All-Powerful	All-Powerful
All-Knowing	All-Knowing
Has become as he is	Forever existed as "I am"
Love, mercy, truth, judgment	Love, mercy, truth, judgment

- Philosophical question: How can there be an infinite regress?
- Theological question: If God is not the ultimate cause of everything, then how can he truly be said to be omnipotent?
- The nature of Jesus Christ

Restored Church (LDS)	Orthodox Christianity
Historical figure	Historical figure
Called apostles, performed miracles, offered specific religious and moral teachings	Called apostles, performed miracles, offered specific religious and moral teachings
Tried by officials, sentenced to death, actually died	Tried by officials, sentenced to death, actually died
Literally, physically raised from the dead on the third day	Literally, physically raised from the dead on the third day
Visited the Nephites in America	
One with God in purpose, not in essence	One with God; of the same essence
“Fully man, fully God”	“Fully man, fully God”
While on earth, not yet equal with God	Eternally coequal with God
Had a beginning as both man and God	Eternally God; became a man

- Theological question: Why would Jesus/Jehovah teach his people that “The LORD our God; the LORD is one” if in fact there was already an even greater God named Heavenly Father?
- Theological question: While Jesus walked the earth, he was not yet equal to Heavenly Father in glory, since he had not yet died and resurrected with a glorified body. How could he make full atonement for our sins?

• The nature of salvation

Orthodox Salvation	LDS Salvation	LDS Exaltation
Signifies eternal life in God’s presence	Commonly signifies eternal life	Signifies eternal life in the presence of Heavenly Father
Union with God	Immortality	Deification
Fellowship with God, and all who are His	Visited by Jesus Christ, but not Heavenly Father	Eternity with Heavenly Father and family
“How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”	Glory that “surpasses all understanding,” yet lower than that of the celestial kingdom	All power, glory, dominion, and knowledge
Those “who believe in the name of the Son of God.”	“Those who received not the testimony of Christ, but... have led lives exempting them from the heaviest punishment,” among others	Those “who have striven to obey all the Divine commandments, accepted the testimony of Christ, and received the Holy Spirit;”

Week 4: Foundations of Latter-Day Saint Teaching, part 2

- Professor Stephen Robinson (LDS) says that while Mormons say “Faith + Works ⇒ Salvation”, they actually mean “Faith ⇒ Salvation + Works”
- Mormonism allows for many viewpoints within its official teachings, so Professor Robinson is not lying. However, the human heart is easily deceived to trust itself even when presented with clear truth.
- LDS teaching is at best unclear on the nature of salvation.

atonement	Jesus’ sacrifice redeems everyone from the effects of the Fall, making it possible for us to obey (or disobey).	Jesus’ sacrifice redeems all who put faith in him, giving us His righteous status before God.
Jehovah	“I am” – Jesus, given authority by the Father to be the world’s Creator and Savior	“I am” – the triune God; the self-existent Creator who came to earth to be our Savior
Godhead	Three beings with a unity of purpose and glory	Father, Son, and Spirit; one God in three persons
Gospel	Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness - “The first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; Repentance; Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost”	The good news of Christ’s redeeming work on our behalf – “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared...”
Covenant	A binding agreement, in particular between God and man; chiefly conditional	A binding agreement, in particular between God and man, conditional or unconditional
Faith	Relying completely on Jesus Christ; “faith is a principle of action and power.”	Relying completely on Jesus Christ; “it is the gift of God”
Grace	“Grace is the help or strength given through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.”	The source of our positive righteousness: Galatians 2:21

Week 5: Mormonism is a culture, not just a theology.

- Shared identities: faith, religious vocabulary, values, **religious practices**, and **history**
 - These shared identities are powerful
- Joseph Smith sought to answer pressing questions:
 - “Which church is true?”
 - “Why aren’t there miracles anymore?”
 - “If God is completely in charge of everything, do my actions matter?”
 - “How can God send people to hell just for wrong beliefs?”
 - “If God saves almost everyone, why should I even try being good?”
 - “What about people who never hear the gospel?”
 - “What happens when children die?”