

Teach From the Little Box
Blurring the Lines between Mainstream Christianity and Mormonism

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Was it because I made eye contact, sitting there on the bench between classes during my freshman year at the U? Why do I seem to be a magnet for the Campus Crusade for Christ? Maybe it's because I don't mind talking to them. Perhaps it's because I don't feel threatened by their simple message of Christ, and they are respectful not to attack my own religion. Maybe it's because I'll be serving a mission in a few months, and I feel I ought to listen to a fellow disciple of Christ if I expect others to offer me the same courtesy.

That wasn't the first time, nor was it the last. One of my best friends in high school was evangelical Christian with whom I once attended church and who attended some LDS functions, given our common LDS circle of friends at our Wasatch Front, LDS-dominated high school.¹

Now I have a new situation: My daughter is preparing to serve a mission in the Bible Belt. In preparation, during family home evening, we held a special lesson on how to approach and effectively teach evangelical Christians.² The premise of our discussion is that these folks love the Lord Jesus, they believe in Him, and they are saved. Period. Everything they already believe about the Lord and His salvation is fundamentally true, and we as LDS have very few if any "bones" to pick with them. We do have much to share that will be received with gladness if it is done correctly, with a willingness to listen first. But I really should flash back a bit more first.

A friend and study partner in my undergrad program excused herself briefly from our University of Utah, Union Building commons table, and the Crusade representatives appeared mysteriously—*or not so mysteriously*—moments later. In that case I felt special because it was the local head of the order!

I have appreciated collegial and natural Gospel discussions with evangelical co-workers through the years—especially stories of conversion and witness—and resonated with the message of friendly, open, not-focused-on-conversion parley, patterned after that of Pastor Greg Johnson and our own Robert Millet.

That prototype "fireside chat" style publicly demonstrated by Johnson and Millet³ served as a reinforcing example for both Ronnie and me when we attended the fireside together. Ronnie was my boisterous evangelical graduate student from Texas who was both opinionated and blunt. Ronnie and I became very good friends and we came to enjoy the ability to discuss any subject with openness and natural ease. Ronnie's powerful account of being born again explained his changed life of commitment. But my story today is not about Ronnie, though he helps me introduce it: In the discipline where Ronnie and I work is an accomplished scholar and teacher, based at a West Texas campus, whom I will refer to as DT. Ronnie idolized Dr. DT for his professional expertise, his cool Texas moniker, his tall athletic build and deep voice—with all those impressions magnified by his dedication to the Christian faith. I had occasion each year for about 8 years to interact with Prof. DT, attending the same out of state engineering design competition—with

Ronnie for the first three of those years. Then a professional conference in Salt Lake City brought Dr. DT to downtown Salt Lake City—in fact, to Utah—for the very first time. I made time to spend with him.

Dr. DT was an advisor with the Campus Crusade for Christ and for Christian groups on his campus, including a student ministry where he teaches a comparative religions course. I found out more listening and asking questions: he's the go-to specialist for debating atheists, evolutionists and Mormons. He is very competitive, competent and confident. As we drove by the state capitol building on our way to dinner the first night, impressed, he commented, "*Very prominent.*" (It must be really flat where he comes from.) Then his observation as we immediately passed the illuminated Salt Lake LDS temple: "Very prominent too, but I am *not* happy about it!" I told him how ironic it was that he came to Utah on opening weekend of Meet the Mormons—unwilling to settle for the cinematic version, he came to meet them in person! For whatever reason, he seemed to have assumed I was not a Mormon, but I was not in a hurry to become the focus of attention, so DT went through several days with that misunderstanding!

Tuesday was conference all day, with an evening banquet at the Grand America Hotel. Very fancy. But DT is a true Texan like Ronnie. He poked his food and asked, "Ian, what do you think this is?" I poked at it too, peeled a flake and said, "It appears to be fish." "That's what I was afraid of." He said. I sacrifice-bunted: "Tell you what: I have beef all the time—comes from being a weekend ranch hand—you take my steak and I'll eat your fish." He was very grateful.

Wednesday was our last day of conference. At the end of it all, we had been invited by the organizers to go to a fancy restaurant. But DT was exhausted and did not want to debrief. Instead he wanted to go shopping for his kids. He has four kids: first two are boy/girl twins, then a girl, and a boy. A similar composition as my own family—even with the firstborn twins—but ten or so years younger. So I offered to see if I could help him find some shops. *Really?* Are there no toy or children's game stores in all of City Creek or the Gateway? What kind of a family centered culture is this, after all? We discovered that it is a sugar-centric culture so he loaded up at the retro candy store in Gateway. Meantime I had been listening to his stories, and found we were both pre-diabetic and several other points of commonality. I was happy asking questions and listening. So much so that at one point he quipped, "when the DT book comes out you won't have to read it!"

As we ate dinner that night, he tired of talking about himself and started asking me questions. The big surprise was to find that I was Mormon. After sharing a bit about my family and interests, the conversation took an authentic turn toward beliefs and sharing means of service. He spends his spring breaks with his Christian students driving to Florida in order to "be there" when out-of-control college kids from all over the country make stupid decisions and find themselves drunk, lost or abandoned. Spring break is aptly named for these. The Christians pick up the broken students like the good Samaritan, get them to a safe place, feed and clothe them as necessary, then when the time is right, witness to them of Christ.

We had substantial time to talk about life philosophies and then comfortably transitioned to religious perspectives.⁴ After having established much common ground, he deeply

pondered everything I told him. I then explained the priesthood, the sealing power, eternal families and the role of prophets, all from the standpoint of the biblical scriptures. DT views the divine potential of humanity as a false precept but appreciates the value I place on the doctrine, because he could relate the wishes and desires of loving Parents in Heaven to the aspirations he and his wife maintain for their own children. He had previously never heard many of these precepts outside the context of a debate and seemed to find them both interesting and insightful. Several times he noted how much we valued in common. He asked sincere, soul-felt questions (as opposed to debate-traps) and got straight answers in return.

The culture of our church to date seems to have been to draw out the differences or the doctrines that separate us from fellow Christians. In our insecurity with first time ‘religious’ conversations we tend to focus superficially on the clean cut word-of-wisdom hoping to forestall inevitable discussions of polygamy— which is really what prurient folks want to know about. If the conversation does eventually come to doctrinal points, we sometimes unwittingly—if not arrogantly—mock those who believe in three divine beings lacking body, parts or passions. But a born-again Christian loves the Lord Jesus and intently studies His life and teachings. Jesus is very real and tangible to them. It makes complete sense to them that the Savior still retains His resurrected body. What else can we learn from one another?

We LDS sometimes confuse what it means to say that faith and grace save us. But we do get that discipleship is all about *work*. Priesthood is work. When we signed up to follow the Lord we signed up for that which is His work. It is a hard labor in love and there is no room for freeloading. Contrary to stereotype, it turns out that the committed Evangelical Christian understands and believes this too, though different words are used: Christianity unambiguously teaches that we cannot work our way to salvation. Works are a byproduct of our commitment to Christ, not part of our salvation. When we LDS pay attention to our own scriptures, we believe this too.

After several days chatting with my colleague I believed a friendship was established and was feeling validated that there is too much that unites for us to spend our time seeking out differences.⁵ But then the penultimate word—meant to be the *final* word—as he prepared to turn and leave was, “I understand your perspective and find it reasonable, but I utterly reject the Mormon description of God that He was once a sinful man: As man is, God once was...”

Open contempt for Mormonism may have been tempered somewhat through our five-day interaction, but I was astounded to learn that this *one doctrine* was the key to a good and devout Christian man still being convinced that I was not a Christian, and that I worshiped a false god. Well, he has a good point, doesn’t he? The source of this false doctrine is none other than Lucifer himself when speaking to Eve in the pre-ordination endowment, “you *must* eat of this fruit... for that is the way Father gained His knowledge.” The debater in DT had arisen one last time and both of us knew he had at his immediate disposal fourteen or so examples of historic statements by LDS leaders that supported his reason for rejecting everything else I had told him... but he stopped in his tracks when I agreed with him. “You are absolutely correct, DT. The dogma is utterly false because Jesus Himself tells us that if not for the *perfect* example of His Father then he, Jesus, would not be able to accomplish His own perfect work.” (I quoted Jn 5:19.)

DT was speechless with incredulity, so I told him that I would be in contact with him when I figured out how to turn that upside-down doctrine back the right way up. Waving, DT's final parting words were: "Good luck with that! Let me know how I can help!"

As I write this, I am sitting on the bus, in front of a conversation between a militant anti-Mormon activist and an LDS person. The activist's approach is through pseudo-friendly presentation of "facts" with subtle undertones suggesting stupidity or ignorance for believing such an outrageous cult. I wonder when my own kids will be running into such people and yearn for the bygone day that brought mutually respectful conversations with the Campus Crusaders for Christ. This activist is quite sophisticated—in his paper-cutting approach—through superficial understanding of LDS literature, canon and history, presented with a *twist* of lemon.

I am grateful for the recent Church *glasnost*⁶ efforts that give our members a place to go when they have questions following such a conversation. I think there is an even greater need for safe havens to ask these and other questions without being labeled a doubter. I think that we can provide such safe harbors from a position of strength, rather than insecurity and defensiveness.

Which brings me back to our Family Home Evening, preparing our daughter how to interact in a positive way with folks who love the Lord through their Bible understanding. The title of this essay relates to the reason why Preach My Gospel has two sets of instructions for teaching The Fall. One section on p.49 gives the complex approach with the traditional, hypothetical (*The Fall was designed and planned to be so because without the Fall, we couldn't have done this or that...*) justification why the Fall was necessary. The small box "Teaching About the Fall" on the next page counsels us to first teach the Fall very simply: "*When first teaching this doctrine, do not teach everything you know about it.*" This second, little box is truly inspired for its simple, straightforward, fact-based message that will resonate with those who already love the Lord, are grateful for the Gospel, and who are prepared to hear the message of the restoration.

Why the little box?

It is counterproductive to approach someone who already understands the Fall from the biblical perspective, telling them *it was not really a sin to disobey God* in the Garden of Eden, but that in fact *disobedience is what God really intended because He Himself went through a similar process and it is the only way to have children and become like Him*. Such a mind-blowing concept reinforces the potential investigator's perception (often created in their Sunday School class) that we LDS worship a non-Christian God. A logical assessment of our official account—originating from Lucifer's statements made in the temple—produces a god who is duplicitous and arbitrary (commands one thing and intends something else), who uses Lucifer as a pawn then punishes him, who gives commands that fundamentally cannot be obeyed without sin, who signs up to the notion that it is required to sin in order to know good, or who provides "agency" then only presents one legitimate choice. We have no logical argument to support our claim, only historical,⁷ traditional,⁸ hypothetical rationalizations,⁹ 'suppositions'¹⁰ and 'delusions'.¹¹ These are the doctrines of Lucifer—mingled with scripture—that frankly do not even stand up to our own revealed definition of truth.¹² Such a debate will never invite the Spirit. You are on your own. To further suggest to your investigator that "the prophets

have said so..." does nothing but undermine the credibility of the prophets.¹³ Therefore we are wisely counseled to altogether avoid the hypothetical discussion and stay with the true, basic facts *in the little box*.

Teach from the little box on p. 50 and put exclamation marks around it! Adam and Eve believed Lucifer, disobeyed God and by so doing they brought sin and death into the world.¹⁴ Humanity became carnal, sensual and devilish. There was no one righteous, "no, not one." (See Romans 3:10,12,21.) There were none who were *not* in need of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus extended his hand, rescuing any who would grasp it through faith on His name. He saved us by ransom in Gethsemane, under the scourge, and on the cross from the grasp of Satan—now god of this world—in whose bondage we were found, and to whose cruel and arbitrary punishments we are otherwise subject. He ransomed us because He suffered those things instead of us and in spite of all, chose to *live* until all was accomplished. Then death came by His own choice too so that he could subsequently conquer that evil tool of Lucifer as well. The Book of Mormon will fill your study days with buckets of relevant scriptural ink to support each of those factual statements found in the New Testament. As you study those fundamental precepts, you will find that there is virtually no doctrinal separation between LDS and evangelical precept at the most basic level. Let's briefly overview the most basic evangelical view of salvation:

Four spiritual laws common to Evangelical Christianity, in their own words¹⁵

1. **God Loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.** (Jn 3:16, Jn 10:10) But why is it that most people are not experiencing the abundant life? Because...
2. **Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore man cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.** (Rom 3:10, 23, 6:23). Sin represents a great gulf separating sinful man from Holy God. There is only one possible way to bridge the gulf...
3. **Jesus Christ is God's ONLY provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.** (Rom 5:8, 1 Cor 15: 3-6, Jn 14:6) Now envision the cross of Jesus symbolically bridging the gulf between sinful man and Holy God. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. But it is not enough to just know these three laws...
4. **We must individually RECEIVE Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.** (Jn 1:12, Eph 2: 8,9, Jn 3:1-8, Rev 3:20, 1 Jn 5:11-13) Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive our sins and to make us the kind of people He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of the will.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood"

Covey's principle¹⁶ of effective teaching never applied better than it does in the case of LDS listening to evangelicals, prior to launching into our missionary message. There will be many slammed doors, courtesy of evangelical pastors having prepared their congregations for how to handle the invading Mormons, if our *first* message is anything *other* than seeking to have a discussion of our mutual love for the Lord, and even a request for the individual to share their witness of how Christ rescued them or how they came unto Christ. It's something they want to talk about and it's something we need to

hear. As we listen, we can affirm that, yes, that was the Holy Spirit working in their lives. Yes, that is salvation.¹⁷ Yes, they will be in the heaven they have been taught about¹⁸ and we believe everything they have told us. It is a matter of understanding and translating what they believe into words, jargon and context *we* understand. And *vice versa*. We should celebrate with them when they describe the actions of the Holy Ghost in their lives. Affirm their experience. Affirm their love for the Savior. Reflect back in your own words your understanding of their witness and ask whether you might share your witness of the Savior as well. If we go to an evangelical home seeking common ground, we will first be enriched, then we will be blessed with an opportunity to testify.

Patiently listen to the Spirit for your turn to testify

Be patient. Listen. Seek to discern their heart through the Spirit and search for love there, rather than waiting to hear something that you want to correct or to segue by jumping in. The point is not to correct them, but to understand them. When it is an appropriate time to speak your heart, do not transition with anything that suggests “but...”, because that argumentation will immediately negate any good will you have created by previously listening and affirming. Instead, transition with words that witness your own commitment to the Savior: “I also love the Lord Jesus and am eternally grateful for what He did for me...”

We need to use words and language that they understand. It may be necessary to translate into their terminology. “Witness” is a more familiar word than “testify” when they hear why you have benefitted from the Gospel¹⁹ (the “good news”) in your life. Certainly when you reference scriptures, ask them to read from their own copy. We can have tremendous confidence in the New International Version (NIV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), and many other translations that remove the raised-eyebrow 17th century cultural clunkiness from the first-time discussion using the KJV. Even the pidgin English translation has value in some circumstances, if not outright entertainment. The point is: use the version they already have and are comfortable with.²⁰ *You* be the one to adapt and explain any translational differences.

How do I witness of the Savior if I have no dramatic story to tell?

It is critically important to realize that God does not punish us for our sins, Satan does. God’s fairness does not dictate in any way the severity of our punishment. So it does not matter that you might not have been a “deep sinner” in the sense of having repented of illegal, immoral or hair-raising crimes. When Paul indicates that “there is none righteous, no, not one”, and when we read in the Book of Mormon how the natural man (each of us) is carnal, sensual & devilish and an enemy to God, it is because we have each listened to and believed Satan at some point in our lives, betraying²¹ God. *Betrayal is the very most basic definition of sin.* Justice is—as a consequence of a choice to believe Satan in preference to God—that we have made ourselves subject to Satan and we are therefore in his grasp. His cruelty and malice are brought to bear on any within his power, and it is not a pretty sight (D&C 19:15-19). Big or small, any betrayal of God by hearkening to Satan is sufficient to—wittingly or not—place ourselves in the power of the adversary and make our situation desperate. Satan does not punish sin in proportion to the severity of the crime. ‘Fairness’ is a foreign notion to the Man of Sin. Unrepentant, your punishment at the hands of Satan will be as cruel and malicious as that imposed on the vilest sinner. You should be just as glad²² as that repentant, previously vile sinner, to have been invited by the Savior to take His rescuing hand, experiencing His grace and

mercy.²³ You should be able to witness with the greatest enthusiasm your gratitude that you chose to accept it and to become His disciple through baptism, and also for the weekly cleansing and forgiveness you experience when partaking of the sacrament.

If you agree with me, why are you here?

Wow. Thank you for asking that question! I am here because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is so much more rich and fulfilling than even you have been taught. Yes, life can bring great joy along with hardship, and hardship does not forsake us when we take on discipleship. But Jesus helps us carry our burdens in life and He intends for the abundant life to bring great joy! God has not gone silent in these modern times. He still speaks through prophets! He still provides new scripture that complements, augments and supports what we have learned to love from the Bible, testifying of Jesus. The power of God exists on the earth not only to do the work and miracles of the Lord, but to perform the saving ordinances of baptism for the living and the dead! The gift of the Holy Ghost is not just a temporary influence as you have experienced, but can be a lifelong constant companion: guiding, directing and warning in addition to comforting. And Heaven is so much more than the vague concept of rapture that Christians have struggled with for centuries. Heaven is that we can experience the joy of Creation, as God is Creator. Heaven is that God's true and authorized priesthood power—now again on the earth—can bind our families together so that no power of death or hell can separate us in the eternities. A loving marriage does not have to terminate at death. Parents can always be loving partners through the power of the Atonement. And they belong to *their* parents, and their own children are sealed to them! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just capable of saving us, but also binding together and exalting those relationships that forever give us the greatest joy! That can be your heaven, and you can share it in the presence of our Holy God, the Father of our spirits, and with His beloved son Jesus the Christ. Let us teach you the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Notes For Missionaries

¹ After ten years out-of-state, my wife and I have brought our family back to the 'ancestral home', and our kids attended the same school as three prior generations. In shame I collected my prize at my 25th high school reunion, for living in closest geographical proximity to the high school!

² This article summarizes that approach in part using the time-honored pseudo role-playing format either beloved or derided by missionaries the world over.

³ For any familiar with the Bob Millet public fireside chats with Rev. Greg Johnson, it was in that pattern of interaction. <http://standingtogether.org/about/greg-johnson/>

⁴ Sometimes the Gospel seems so complex. It is like a vast jigsaw puzzle obtained from the Deseret Industries thrift store with some pieces missing, and a few random bits of other puzzles thrown in because when they were found from wherever the dog or the toddler dragged them off to, it was not clear to which box they actually belonged. Sometimes we do not know where to begin in assembling the whole thing together in a meaningful way and sort out the inconsistencies, the unknowns, the contradictions and the mysteries. Sometimes we confuse that which is gospel with church or cultural tradition.

I now believe that much of the perceived complexity is cultural in origin, and that the simplicity of the Gospel can be reduced to a very few precepts: God loved us and gave us moral agency so that we could choose to experience the same joy He experiences—or not. We chose not to seek wisdom from God, but we were rather beguiled to do so from His adversary. That witting or unwitting betrayal placed us in a desperate situation first because we willfully subjected ourselves to a malicious and cruel master by seeking his wisdom and obeying his voice, and second because in that Garden we also gave away any means of overcoming mistakes and failures (different from *sins*) under our own power. A Savior was prepared (Abraham 3:24-28; Moses 4:1-6) from the Grand Council of Heaven anticipating the means of rescue if such was needed because of our tragic abuse of the agency we had been given. Jesus did His great work of ransoming Atonement as one not beholden to the adversary and having conquered evil and death. He thus extended His offer that we too might be freed. When we recognize the dire nature of our own individual situations and are willing to grasp His extended hand through baptism, we are rescued and saved from an unwanted master, and instead accept a new master, loving, just, merciful and kind. But the master—whose name we now bear—holds us with high expectations to our probationary terms. It was by His grace that we were saved. Now He expects us to get to work: work in the service of those who do not yet know Him; work in the service of those striving to become like Him; of the unsaved dead; of relieving suffering and need. This *work* is the essence of the Holy Priesthood, given by the Lord to act as He would act, to do as He would do, to serve as He would serve.

⁵ In addition to reviewing an early version of this essay, I also asked DT to provide me with his view of the essence of Christianity: what is the gospel of salvation and why is it necessary? This is his heartfelt response: “The way I understand Christianity is through a few fundamental concepts. The first concept is that God is a being who is eternal, omnipotent, and can create *ex nihilo*. We live in a realm where we assume a starting point and want to understand origins. I have to accept by faith that God has no origin, or at least not one I can understand. Next, God has created human beings with a nature that goes beyond protons, neutrons, and electrons. He has endowed us with a soul and spirit that separate us from living beings in the animal kingdom, which is why He said we are made in His image. He has revealed Himself to us in two prominent ways. One is through the splendor of the creation and the other is through Jesus Christ, His one and only Son. Through scripture, He has declared that the Godhead is three persons; the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. All three are equally God, separate personalities united eternally in purpose, while displaying love for each other and mankind. The disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden resulted in sin and death entering the world. I believe that this sin caused the rest of the forthcoming human race to be separated from God. The establishment of the Jews as a distinct people group is vitally important to the eventual birth, life, and death of Jesus. God has used the Jews throughout their existence in both good times, and extremely hard times. Numerous fulfilled prophecies speak to the unique nature of the Jews and God’s special relationship with them. 2000 years ago, through a Jewish lineage, Jesus Christ was sent to Earth to provide salvation to all those who would receive it. His conception was miraculous, which I believe allowed Him to not carry “original sin.” On Earth, He was fully human in that He had a body that responded just like anyone else’s to pleasure or pain. His spirit was the same as it always was, eternal and divine. He had the choice to obey His Father or sin. He always chose to

obey. He was publically executed on a cross, just like thousands of others during that time. Over and over again, writers of the New Testament emphasize the importance of His shed blood, indicating that there is something about it that is vital to the redemption of mankind. As He took the sin of the world on Himself, His Father was forced to disassociate Himself from Jesus. This is something that I can only approximately understand: an eternity of perfect union was interrupted. This condition, rather than the physical suffering, is what Jesus dreaded. We obtain salvation when we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord. To do this, we acknowledge His divinity, accept His atoning death on the cross, repent of our sins, and pledge to live a life that is pleasing to Him. In response, He sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and guide us, as well as allowing us to know Him personally. This is a difficult concept, but one that I believe I experience and have the testimony of others to confirm. Those that choose not to accept Him are subject to judgment that culminates in eternal separation from Him. Hell is a place that was specifically designed for punishing Lucifer and his minions, but humans will end up there also because of their disobedience and disbelief. An eternal existence in Heaven is promised to those that have chosen Jesus as Savior and Lord.”

⁶ *Glasnost*: I am referring here to the recent church publication of the excellent essays, including those on polygamy, race and the priesthood, and gender issues as well as the YouTube video providing information on the garment and temple robes. This gives me hope that someone inside the Church will be willing to listen to a friendly voice conveying a means of creating strong new ecumenical bridges. I know these people exist. Who are the inspired writers of the little box on p. 50 of *Preach My Gospel*, and who are the editors that removed the can-o-worms discussion of “as man is, God once was” from Chapter 5 of the Lorenzo Snow manual? I need to meet them. There is work to be hastened.

⁷ The notion that there were mysterious technical difficulties preventing our first parents from procreating and requiring them first to be disobedient while in the Garden is counter to the “irrevocable law” as decreed in heaven and conveyed to us in D&C 130:20,21. This perception of garden infertility is also the primary underlying feature of the false ‘Adam-God doctrine’. (See David John Buerger, *Dialogue* v15 #1, 1976, p.17.) The delusional premise of garden infertility and the debunked Adam-God doctrine are both based on Lucifer’s lie that “there is no other way” to procreate (among other things) than to partake of the forbidden fruit—*not even for a god*. Our persistence in following this false tradition (D&C 93:38,39)—propounded by the father of lies (Jn 8:44)—convicts us before Christianity and condemns us before our God (D&C 93:31,32). It is upside-down, having originated from the secret shadows of Lucifer’s dark tree (2Ne 27:27).

⁸ *Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God. And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers. (D&C 93:24-38,39)*

⁹ Rationalization— when the Angel of the Lord appeared to our exiled first parents and explained the law of sacrifice (Moses 5:7), the very next verse documents their commanded obligations in order to return to the presence of the lord: *repent*. The Holy Ghost fell upon our parents as documented in verse 9, specifically in order to bear

testimony of the Father and the Son, and refer to the Son's role in their pending rescue. If the delirious responses of Adam (v.10) and Eve (v.11) to the news that they would be rescued sound a bit like rationalizations (*look at all the good that never would have happened were it not for my/our transgression*), then yes, it is because they had not yet had time to implement that important principle—they had not yet repented: *By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them* (D&C 58:43). The following verses (and into Moses 6) document how they were *subsequently* taught the Gospel, repented, were baptized, and then began teaching their children the Gospel. Outside of Moses 5:11 and 2 Ne 2:22-24 we have no other scripture that supports the false notion that disobedience was necessary for procreation, or that we should celebrate the Fall in any way. To the contrary, the rest of the prophets of the Book of Mormon account the Fall to unrighteous acts of agency with dire consequences. This is good for you to study for yourself. For example, when reading 2 Ne 9:6, be sure to account for the important meaning imparted by the very first comma. Then read the rest of the chapter to see if the Fall was a good thing.

¹⁰ “Suppose” is the word Lehi uses in 2 Ne 2:17 after having read the accounts of Adam and Eve from the brass plates of Laban (1 Ne 5:11), which—we infer—contain the rationalizations of our pre-repentant first parents as described in the previous note. Lehi took those words at face value and tried to wedge Eve's false delusions into his otherwise insightful sermon. The precepts of 2 Ne 2:22-24 are therefore made of the same stuff as Eve's rationalizations: The philosophies of Lucifer (“*there is no other way*”) that became scripture. See also 2 Ne 9:28,29 and read this with new eyes believing that the warning really applies to you and me and others who engage in “supposing” that leads to casting aside God's explicit commandment “*Thou shalt not... remember that I forbid it!*”, not some random intellectual.

¹¹ “Delusion” is the word Paul uses to broadly describe the thing that supports the great Lie peddled by the man of sin, specifically as he sits in the temple of god proclaiming himself to be a god. See 2 Thess 2:3-12. Wow—is that not a familiar visage to attentive temple patrons? In the JST version of these verses, we see that God “suffereth” this to happen, because of our own unbelieving choices. In your own pondering and study, see if “there is no other way to procreate than through disobedience” doesn't fit the *delusion* that was restored, along with all the beauty and truth of the restored gospel (D&C 27:6; 86:10), simply because it was spoken by the mouth of a holy prophet, even Lehi. What, then, is the Great Lie? Just that our Holy Father was once a sinful man, and that there is *no other way* to become like Him than through sin, suffering, sorrow and death.

¹² *And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.* (D&C 93:24,25) It is clear that the Moses 5:11 hypothetical rationalizations do not fall within the scope of what is truth: hypothetical events and situations are neither known nor knowable—they are irrelevant.

Note in these and the subsequent verses, how explicitly this definition applies to the circumstances of the Fall. Verses 26-28 tie certain concepts together: the Spirit of truth (contrasted against the spirit of that wicked one, from the prior verse) as connected to “fulness of truth” which comes from “keeping the commandments” which leads to

receiving further truth and light, then leading to glorification in truth and knowing all things.

So the definition of truth is specifically related to the reception of light *that comes through the keeping of the commandments*. This is why Eve's rationalization is so contextually different from, say, Mormon's hypothetical lamentation "Oh ye fair ones..." in Mormon 6:16-20; or from his earlier editorial hypothetical praise of Captain Moroni in Alma 48:17; or even from Alma's zealously hypothetical desire for an angelic voice in Alma 29:1-9: These other if-only-then example statements were based on assumptions of obedience. *But they are still irrelevant hypothetical situations*. Eve was rationalizing their disobedience with a beguiled hypothetical situation in Moses 5:11. Her pre-repentant perspective is easily traced to the Father of Lies and his "no other way". This is not throwing Eve or Adam under the bus. It simply acknowledges that they had not yet repented when they each so deliriously responded to the news they would be rescued from exile. Those responses were objectively and faithfully recorded in Moses 5:10,11. We should worry less about not celebrating their transgression and instead praise and thank them for showing us how to repent and return to the Lord (Moses 5:58,59; Moses 6:27-32; 55-68).

¹³ Don't panic. Stay on the ship, even though a ship requires a lot of energy and time to accomplish a change—which change is the essence of continuing revelation and restoration. It is prophesied, after all, that the man of sin will be revealed. And that foretold revealing activity is now being realized merely through your act of reading and sharing the message of this article: *God is trustworthy in the temple and always; Lucifer is always false, even when heard speaking in the temple*. Take heart in the fact that the very canonical sources used to propagate the Lie and the Delusion are the same ones used to refute it, as restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith! The doctrine will be fully right-side-up when you hear all of Lucifer's temple statements discredited and the infertility paradox deciphered from the black walnut pulpit. It will be so because Paul foresaw it (2Thess 2:3-12) and because we have been promised that the keys have been restored for the last time. You are in the ship that bears those keys. See D&C 13:1.

¹⁴ What was the cause of the Fall? Was it the need to bear children? No, there was nothing "enabling" about it. The cause is clearly indicated in Abinadi's last words: Mosiah 16:3-5 *the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.*

See also D&C 29:34-41 (emphasis added), which describes the fact that God does not give any commandment to one that does not apply to all. There was no transition period between what was acceptable for our first parents in the sight of the Lord versus what is acceptable for us to do. There was never any expectation to break one commandment for the purpose of keeping another. To *tempt* is a necessary and sufficient condition to activate agency. Agency is the *only* reason there could be a fall, and agency was in fact exercised in unrighteousness in the Garden:

D&C 29:34 *Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created. 35 Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual. 36 And it came to pass that Adam, being tempted of the devil—39 And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet—40 Wherefore, it came to pass that the devil tempted Adam, and he partook of the forbidden fruit and transgressed the commandment, wherein he became subject to the will of the devil, because he yielded unto temptation. 41 Wherefore, I, the Lord God, caused that he should be cast out from the Garden of Eden, from my presence, because of his transgression, wherein he became spiritually dead, which is the first death, even that same death which is the last death, which is spiritual, which shall be pronounced upon the wicked when I shall say: Depart, ye cursed.*

¹⁵ Four Spiritual Laws tract, Bill Bright, President, Campus Crusade for Christ, Int'l, 1965. I still have the original tract in my missionary bag, from that long-ago freshman day sitting on the bench with my first contact with the Crusade.

¹⁶ Covey, Stephen R. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People International bestseller

¹⁷ First, be clear in your own mind that salvation and exaltation are not the same thing. Salvation is what releases us from the grasp of Lucifer, and that escape is beyond any capacity of our own. A life of committed discipleship is then the path to exaltation as our master teaches us what it means to be like Him (1Jn 3:2; Moroni 7:48). We believe exactly the same as they do on the grace/works question. The Bible talks about “works” in the context of the strict Hebraic law. Those works won’t save anyone. And neither do we believe that we can rescue ourselves from Satan’s clutches. We cannot earn salvation in any way, shape or form. Not even “after all we can do”, for all we *can* do is exercise faith, repent, and seek to be baptized. Everything else came through the miracle of our Lord’s Atonement and sacrifice. They have confessed on bended knee with great sincerity that Jesus is the Christ, and that humble, sincere confession is the minimum requirement for receiving even God’s Telestial glory, which is very much the same as what they expect from ‘heaven’. We have absolutely no argument with evangelicals on the question of grace/works. Following baptism it is also no different: it takes great effort and commitment to be a disciple of Christ and live as He would have us live. The Evangelicals will be among the first to sign up to that. Jn 8:30-32, 45-47: believe *on* (by exercising faith), then continue (believe & act) to be a disciple. See also Jn 10:24-27, 12:26: To believe is to follow and to serve. But no need to talk about that using “works” terminology. We are not doing this for merit badges and brownie buttons.

¹⁸ Now don’t get your garmies in a twist here. They have been taught that they will go to an unimaginably glorious heaven to be with God, and their God lacks body, parts, and passions. So everything they receive will be according to their expectations. They are already qualified (with a long wait) for the Telestial or Terrestrial kingdoms of God’s

glory even without an authorized baptism. Isn't it true that though these are God's glories of unimaginable wonder, goodness and peace, yet the unbaptized will not be directly in the presence of an embodied God? And didn't they already agree to part their marriage at death? So dissolved relationships are no surprise and it will be irrelevant to them whether He has a body or not, since they will not be with Him, but *only* be immersed in His loving Spirit. *Their theology is technically correct if only in effect, and at least it is not worth arguing about!*

¹⁹ The Gospel is not the same as the Church. Don't use these terms interchangeably. One is the pearl and the other is the box. This is a good time for you to be clear in your mind that the Gospel is what Jesus did for us (3Ne 27:13-20), and the church is the protectorate of the priesthood keys and the associated saving ordinances (think: baptism). At this point you are *strictly* witnessing of the Gospel—the “good news”. Your job is to invite people to come unto Christ. Having done so, they will be converted to Christ, becoming born again in Him. Please don't think or speak of converting people to the box—to the *Church*. You will not at this point build good will or trust by emphasizing how you belong to the only true church. Rather, focus on the need for the saving ordinance of an *authorized* baptism by one holding *keys*. Later, you will be able to teach about the “applied” parts of the good news, which comprise those Church related things we do as servants of the Lord to feed His sheep and act as His disciples (3Ne 27:21, Moroni 10:31).

²⁰ Are you conversant in the New Testament? Is it possible to be a disciple of Jesus Christ without knowing Him? Have you learned to love the Lord because you have studied His life and ministry from those who knew Him? Minimally, the Gospel of John should be something you are competent to reference, talk about and testify of.

Also think of how you feel when approached by Jehovah's Witnesses, and they carry a “special” Bible. You haven't trusted it, because you don't know what they've done with it and you don't know what's been discarded and what's been added. Similarly, Evangelicals think Mormons have adulterated the Bible, and they don't think we actually use it or trust it ourselves. Therefore they generally don't trust us or the Bible we carry. (Hence, this first discussion is not the best time to talk about the Joseph Smith Translation.) Personally I carry an NIV in addition to my KJV for this purpose.

²¹ Betrayal—I know this is a very strong word to describe such a little thing as eating an apple, which can't really be all that bad, right? Perhaps it seems frivolous for God to so punish everyone involved for such a triviality. Hence it becomes easy to place this disobedience to God down on the scale of a mere (and necessary) transgression, rather than a full-blown sin. In doing so, by the way, we ignore the fact that Father called it a ‘sin’ when placing an armed cherubim to guard the way of the Tree of Life, and we also set aside the fact that the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance—D&C 1:31—in other words, there is no best-to-worst scale that makes it okay to sin at all. Best to understand what sin is, instead, and what makes it different from regular old mistakes and failures, so you don't go beating up on yourself too much for the latter *imperfections* and neglect focusing on what the former *really* means.

I agree that the apple is merely a distraction from what the real sin is. To get to the real sin, you have to first recall what happened in the Grand Council of Heaven and contemplate the magnitude of the disloyalty involved in being in the presence of God, feeling His love, hearing His truth and *then* willfully and intentionally choosing instead to believe and follow the liar. The liar was not only the adversary of God and of all truth, but he also did not have our best intentions in mind. *Duh!* This was disloyalty by that pathetic “third part”: open rebellion, treachery, treason and betrayal of the highest order. It was the unpardonable sin that led to eternal death (no body, eternal separation from God, eternal subjection to Lucifer). See D&C 76:25-38.

Now, come back to the Garden scene with our parents and ask what could have been so significant as to similarly lead to death: separation from God and the spirit from the body? What sinful choice could have caused the subjection of the entire human family to Lucifer, becoming carnal, sensual and devilish, and an enemy to God? Was it the eating of the apple? No, that was merely the sign as the donning of the apron was its token. As referred to previously in the notes, the *name* is told us by Paul, in 2 Thess 2:3-12 (see NIV): “the Lie”. Here in the Garden we see the same scene of human moral agency playing out, with two trees, two legitimate options, their respective advocates, and well-defined consequences for each opposing choice. We see our parents being married and instructed in the presence of God, feeling His love and His joy in promising that same joy to His children. Then we watch as our parents converse with the liar, ask him questions and then preferentially and tragically do his bidding, in direct disobedience to that *Thou shalt not* commandment against an act which was expressly *forbidden* by Father. Is this not rebellion? Is this not disloyalty? Is it not betrayal leading to the promised death and subjection to Lucifer? This is the awful and disastrous shortcut to “know” evil: to subject yourself to it! (“*I know thee now, thou art Lucifer...*”) Whereas wisdom and understanding are intended in the divine plan to come from facing evil and then turning away therefrom (study this in the scriptures where the concept is abundantly represented).

And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom’s paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples. (Mosiah 2:36,37) See also Mos 15:26; definition of the verb ‘rebel’ in 3 Ne 6:18.

²² Glad to the point of testifying and witnessing to the power of the Atonement in ransoming and rescuing us from the grasp of the adversary—his punishment and his death. Think of this gratefully when you partake of the sacrament. Let this thought guide your enthusiastic praise in the Hosanna shout, the next time you participate in a temple dedication.

²³ Grace & mercy: Don’t be afraid of these words, or of using them correctly. Study what they mean in the scriptures. (You have been snatched from the darkest abyss just like Alma.) Relate them to the Atonement and to our mortal time of probation. Make them a part of your core testimony.