

Cover: 1891 D&C, p. 54, "the Father being a personage of Spirit"

An understandable concern, expressed by Latter-day Saints¹, is that non-LDS Christians² do not consider the LDS faith to be truly Christian. On the other hand, Joseph Smith's First Vision condemned all Christian creeds as "an abomination" and declared that "those professors were all corrupt".

But we see hope for positive dialogue, based on several Biblical truths, sustained in the solemn assemblies of the LDS church for 86 years as the "doctrine" of the original *Doctrine and Covenants*³ (1835 D&C), but omitted in 1921. Let's examine those truths:

Before 1921 we both taught that God has always been God

In the 1835 D&C, the *Doctrine* consisted of seventy-five pages of lessons titled, *Theology*—also referred to as the *Lectures on Faith*. In the third lecture, p. 36, Joseph Smith taught that, in order to have faith in God unto life and salvation, it is necessary to have "...a correct idea of his character, perfections and attributes."

The lesson then proceeds to examine the attributes of God, as given by *revelation*, mostly quoted and paraphrased from the *Bible*. One of those attributes was that God has *always* been God:

...even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God (1835 D&C, p. 37; Psalm 90:2, JST⁴).

...he is God over all, from everlasting to everlasting... (1835 D&C, p. 39)

Then, rightly, Joseph taught that:

...seeing that these are attributes of the Deity, they are unchangeable—being the same yesterday, today, and forever... for God never changes, therefore his attributes and character remain forever the same (1835 D&C, p. 51).

- 1 Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon or LDS).
- 2 Members of Christian denominations which have the *Bible* alone as a guide for faith and practice.
- 3 Full page documentation for all references to the 1835 D&C can be viewed and printed from a pdf file at www.crcmin.org/PDFs/Building_a_Bridge_W:A_E.pdf
- 4 *Joseph Smith Translation*
- 5 *Book of Mormon*
- 6 Italics added in all quotes.

(See also D&C 20:17, 28; Moroni 8:18⁵; and Mormon 9:9⁵, all of which still reflect the 1835 LDS theology.)

The *Bible* and non-LDS Christian churches have always taught that God has existed, as God, *from eternity*, without beginning (Psalm 90:2; Deuteronomy 33:27). In 1835, Latter-day Saints were in agreement with the *Bible* on this important doctrine.

What happened?

At the April 1844 Conference of the Church, Joseph Smith made public a dramatic change in his teachings about the nature of God. He said:

We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will *refute*⁶ that idea...he was once a man like us (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 345–346; *History of the Church* 6:305; *Journal of Discourses* 6:3).

Joseph no longer believed and taught, as he did in the 1835 D&C, that God was "God from all eternity." That which was absolutely necessary for our salvation in 1835 was no longer true nine years later. The new LDS God, from 1844 through today, was once a mortal man, *without the powers of godhood*, who later became a God (*Gospel Principles*, p. 305, 1995; *TPJS*, pp. 345–346). Before, God had been the independent Creator of all things (1835 D&C, p.12, 53). Now, he was dependent on *another God*, his father, for his birth and path to godhood (*Search These Commandments, Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide*, 1985, p. 152; *Doctrines of Salvation* 2:47).

Joseph Smith's teachings about this important attribute of God had been identical to the teachings of the *Bible* and non-LDS Christian churches. But, with this revised theology, he had departed (apostatized) from his own faith and scriptures.

Today, many Latter-day Saints profess to believe both contradictory ideas, that God has been God from all eternity *and* that he was once a man who became a God. But Joseph Smith did not believe both at the same time. First, he admitted having believed the 1835 doctrine by saying, "We have *imagined and supposed* that God was God from all eternity." Then he said he would *refute* that idea. In other words, in 1844, he would prove it wrong. It was no longer true.

This new teaching—changing the nature of God—not only disturbed many Latter-day Saints of the day, but also guaranteed an estrangement from the Bible-believing non-LDS Christian body.

Before 1921 we both taught that there is only one God

Throughout early LDS Scriptures and teachings, there was only one God who had created everything, throughout the immensity of space. The 1835 D&C has these statements:

We here observe that God is the only supreme governor, and independent being...who is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient; without beginning of days or end of life (p. 12).

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things...and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him (p. 27; 1 Cor 8:6, JST).

I am God and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning (p. 45; Isa 46:9, JST).

...and there is no God else beside me, a just God and a Savior. (p. 46; Isa 45:21, JST)

The *Joseph Smith Translation* of the *Bible* also states:

Thou, even thou, art LORD *alone*; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host... (Nehemiah 9:6, JST)

...before me there was no God formed. Neither shall there be after me. (Isaiah 43:10, JST)

Today's LDS scriptures still have remnants of Joseph Smith's original theology of only one God:

Which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God, infinite and eternal, without end (D&C 20:28).

...Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God... (Alma⁵ 11:44)

Clearly there was only one God, anywhere, at any time, in LDS theology before 1839, in agreement with what the *Bible* and non-LDS Christians have taught from the beginning.

What happened?

According to the D&C, on March 20, 1839, God gave Joseph Smith the following revelation announcing:

...A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest (D&C 121:28).

Eventually, Joseph went on to claim that:

...I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the *plurality of Gods*. It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years...and [Father, Son & Holy Ghost]