

MORMON SCRIPTURE: The Articles of Faith, Part IV

By Marvin W. Cowan

In our previous discussions of the LDS Articles of Faith we looked at their historical context and then the meaning of the first two Articles in the light of that context. We will now discuss the third Article of Faith which declares, “We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.” While this Article refers to “the atonement of Christ,” that phrase is not found in the New Testament even though the concept of the atonement of Christ is certainly there.

The word “atonement” is used many times in the Old Testament but it is not found in the New Testament except in the King James Version of Romans 5:11 where it should be translated “reconciliation.” In that respect the word “atonement” is like the word “Trinity” because the doctrine is in the New Testament, but not the word itself. The Biblical teaching about how man can be reconciled to God through Christ’s substitutionary atonement is found in texts like Romans 5:6-11; I Corinthians 15:3; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:24; I John 2:2 and many others. A good summary of what the atonement means to Christians is found in I John 1:7b, which says, “the blood of Jesus Christ His [God’s] Son, cleanses us from all sin.”

But we need to know what Mormons believe about “the atonement of Christ” in order to understand the third Article of Faith. LDS Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie wrote on pages 61-62 of *Mormon Doctrine*,

A knowledge of two great truths is essential to an understanding of the doctrine of the atonement: 1. The fall of Adam; and 2. The divine Sonship of our Lord. Adam’s fall brought spiritual and temporal death into the world. Spiritual death is to be cast out of the presence of the Lord and die as pertaining to the things of righteousness, or in other words things of the spirit. Temporal death or natural death is the separation of the body and spirit...the atonement of Christ is designed to ransom men from the effects of the fall of Adam in that both spiritual and temporal death are conquered...The body and spirit which separated, incident to what men call the natural death, are reunited in immortality... *Immortality* comes as a free gift, by the grace of God alone, without works of righteousness. *Eternal life* is the reward for “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Third Article of Faith).

McConkie further explains on page 378 of the same book, “Immortality is to live forever in the resurrected state with body and spirit inseparably connected.” And on page 669 he wrote, “Unconditional or general salvation, that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law, consists in the mere fact of being resurrected. In this sense salvation is synonymous with immortality.”

A pamphlet by LDS Apostle Stephen L. Richards entitled *Contributions of Joseph Smith* explains on page 6, “There will be general salvation for all in the sense in which the term is generally used, but salvation, meaning resurrection, is not *exaltation*” (which is sometimes called individual salvation). Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth Mormon Prophet also wrote, “Salvation is twofold: *General*—that which comes to all men irrespective of a belief (in this life) in Christ—and, *Individual*—that which man merits through his own acts through life and

by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. I, p. 134). Notice that in the LDS definitions above, *immortality*, *resurrection* and *salvation* are synonymous.

But, the Bible does not teach that everyone will receive "general salvation" whether or not they believe in Christ, nor does the Bible ever call resurrection "salvation." On the contrary, the Bible says, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16b). And John 3:18 declares, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." The Bible teaches, "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). But the resurrection of the just is very different from that of the unjust. Daniel 12:2 says, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." And Jesus said in John 5:28-29, "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

If "resurrection" and "salvation" mean the same thing as LDS claim above, then those who receive the "resurrection of damnation" also receive salvation! That would contradict what Jesus said above in John 5:28-29 as well as many other Biblical texts. Furthermore, II Corinthians 6:2b says, "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold *now is the day of salvation*." Is the resurrection taking place *now*? If the resurrection is not happening *now*, then resurrection does not mean the same thing as salvation. We have been primarily discussing what Mormons call "General Salvation."

McConkie said in order to understand the atonement of Christ we needed to know two great truths: 1. The fall of Adam and 2. The divine Sonship of Christ. He explained the LDS view of the fall of Adam in the above quotations, but the LDS view of the divine Sonship of Christ has not been discussed yet. In order to understand the LDS view of "the divine Sonship of Christ" we first need to understand how LDS view God the Father. We briefly discussed that where we discussed the first Article of Faith in "Part II" of our series on the Articles of Faith. We urge you to read that to understand how the LDS view of "the divine Sonship of Christ" is related to their view of God.

Next month we will continue our discussion of the third LDS Article of Faith and consider the LDS view of the divine Sonship of Christ as well as their view of Individual Salvation or Exaltation as they often call it. If you want to read more on this subject from an LDS viewpoint, *The Articles of Faith* by LDS Apostle, James Talmage is a good source of information.