

MORMON SCRIPTURE

The Articles of Faith, Part VI

By Marvin W. Cowan

We previously discussed the first three “Articles of Faith” of the Mormon Church. We are discussing these 13 creedal statements because they use words familiar to Christians but they have very different meanings to Mormons. If Christians and Mormons really want to communicate, they need to understand the meaning of the words used by each other. Hopefully, articles like this will help make that possible. The fourth Article of Faith declares, “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.” For Bible believing Christians, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not just the *first* of several things that God requires for men to be saved and have eternal life with Him, but it is *all* that He requires. Texts like John 3:15-18, 36; 5:24; 6:47; Romans 1:16-17; 3:19-28; 10:9-10; 1 John 5:10-13 etc., make that very clear. And even faith is God’s gift to us according to Ephesians 2:8-9.

In his book explaining the Articles of Faith, LDS Apostle James Talmage said, “Faith in a passive sense, that is, as mere *belief* in the more superficial sense of the term is inefficient as a means of salvation.... A most pernicious doctrine [is] that of justification by belief alone. The Savior taught that *works* were essential to the validity of profession and the efficacy of faith.... Yet, in spite of the plain word of God, dogmas of men have been promulgated to the effect that by faith alone may salvation be attained.” And later he said, “The sectarian dogma of justification by faith alone has exercised an influence for evil” (*The Articles of Faith*, pp. 107-108 & 479). But Paul declared that God is “the Justifier of him who *believes* in Jesus,” and then asked, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? *Of works*? Nay, but by the law of *faith*. Therefore, we conclude that a man *is* justified by *faith* without [apart from] the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:26-28).

Mormons often quote part of Philippians 2:12 to teach that men must “work out their own salvation” in addition to believing in Christ. Works are a very important part of Mormon salvation as we showed in our last discussion about the third Article of Faith. But Philippians 2:13 explains that we can *work out* only what God has first worked *in* us. While Biblical Christians do not believe their works help save them, they do believe their works are the evidence of their faith (James 2:18). Joseph Smith, Mormonism’s founder, began his *Lectures on Faith* by declaring, “*Faith* being the first principle in revealed religion, and the *foundation of all righteousness*....” Yet, LDS Apostle McConkie wrote, “*Faith is* a gift of God bestowed as *a reward for personal righteousness*” (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 264). How can one have personal righteousness *before* he has faith if faith is the “foundation of all righteousness” as Smith declared? Hebrews 11:6 also says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him [God].” If you can’t please God without faith, can God be so pleased with your personal righteousness that He will reward you with faith? Obviously, the Mormon view of faith is confusing and very different from Biblical faith.

The object of faith for both Mormons and Christians is Jesus Christ. But as we discussed in last month’s article, the Jesus of Mormonism is not the same Jesus that the Bible

teaches. So, even though the fourth Article of Faith begins with "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," it is not referring to the Jesus that the Bible teaches. John 1:1 declares, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and Bible believing Christians understand that "the Word" refers to Christ, as John 1:14 confirms. Thus, Christ was God manifested in the flesh just as Paul said in I Timothy 3:16. That is a very different Jesus from the Mormon Jesus who was born as a baby spirit in a pre-mortal world to God and His wife. Mormons believe that baby spirit grew to maturity and "attained that pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a God, as the Lord Omnipotent while yet in his pre-existent state." Mary and God the Father, who is a resurrected man with a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's, became the parents of that pre-mortal Jesus when He was later born physically on this earth as the literal Son of God (*Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 84, 129, 278, 471, 742). Thus, when Mormons talk of "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," neither the faith nor Jesus Christ are the same as those in the Bible.

Repentance is the second thing mentioned in the fourth Article of Faith. President Spencer W. Kimball, the 12th LDS Prophet, wrote, "Repentance and forgiveness are part of the glorious climb toward *godhood*" (*The Miracle of Forgiveness*, p.14). He also taught, "There are sins that are so serious that we know of *no forgiveness* for them" (p. 61). And he said, "Christ's death on the cross offers us exemption from the eternal punishment for *most sins*" (p. 133). But, I Corinthians 15:3 declares, "Christ died for our sins." And I John 1:7 declares that "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from *all sin*." Referring to the thief on the cross, Kimball said, "No one can repent on the cross, nor *in prison*, nor *in custody*" (p. 166). If such people can't repent, why are Mormon chaplains teaching prisoners about Mormonism? Kimball also quoted from *Doctrine & Covenants* 82:7 which says, "Unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God." Then he said, "Each *previously forgiven sin* is added to the new one and the whole gets to be a heavy load" (p. 170). But, according to *Doctrine & Covenants* 58:42, God doesn't even remember the sins He forgives! Hebrews 10:17 in the Bible also teaches that. And Psalm 103:12 declares, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." If God doesn't remember the sins He forgives, and He removes them as far as the east is from the west, how can He put those same sins all back on someone who sins after he has repented? It is obvious that Kimball holds views of repentance and forgiveness different from the Bible.

Next month we will continue our discussion of the fourth Article of Faith. For more on the LDS view of faith and repentance, see Spencer Kimball's *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, published in 1969 by Bookcraft in Salt Lake City, UT.