

MORMON SCRIPTURE: The Articles of Faith, Part V

By Marvin W. Cowan

The third LDS Article of Faith declares: "We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel." LDS Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie, explained, "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" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 61-62). Our last article briefly discussed some of the LDS views of the atonement and the fall of Adam, but there is a lot more involved. The fall or transgression of Adam was explained in Part III of this series when we discussed the second Article of Faith.

Mormons believe God gave Adam two conflicting commands: 1. To multiply and replenish the earth and 2. Not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam wisely chose to break the lesser commandment so that he could obey the more important command to reproduce. This doctrine is taught on pages 36-38 of *The Ensign* (an official adult LDS magazine) for January 2002. It says on page 38, "As Latter-day Saints, we believe that Adam and Eve's choice to partake of the *forbidden fruit* was ultimately a *good thing*—an essential act for our growth." Is it really a *good thing* to disobey God's command? The Bible calls that "sin"!

McConkie said the second thing necessary to understand the atonement was "the divine Sonship of our Lord." But to understand the LDS view of Christ's "divine Sonship," one needs to understand the LDS view of God the Father. We discussed that in Part II of this series concerning the First Article of Faith. LDS believe: God "the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (*Doctrine & Covenants* 130:22) because He "was once as we are now and *is* an exalted (resurrected) man" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 345-346).

McConkie explains the "divine Sonship of Christ" this way: "All men were first born in pre-existence as the literal *spirit offspring* of God our Heavenly Father...and are in the similitude of the universal *Father and Mother*, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity...Christ, destined to be the Only Begotten Son in Mortality, was the first spirit offspring in pre-existence" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 84). He also said, "God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy Man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; He was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about his paternity; He was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural course of events, for He is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says" (Ibid. p. 742).

He said of Mary's role in Christ's birth: "Our Lord's mother, Mary, like Christ, was chosen and foreordained in pre-existence for the part she was destined to play in the great plan of salvation... she was one of the noblest and greatest of all the spirit offspring of the Father... Nephi (in the *Book of Mormon*) saw her as "A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins... As such a virgin she gave birth to a Son whose Father was the Almighty God" (Ibid. p. 471). Notice that McConkie said Mary was a spirit daughter of God the Father in the pre-mortal world and He was also the Father of her Son in this world!

LDS scripture says, God "the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as

man's" (*D&C* 130:22). LDS also believe Christ was begotten by God "*in the same way* that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 547). So, the LDS view of the "divine Sonship of Christ" is very different from what is recorded in Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38 and other biblical texts.

The last part of the third Article of Faith declares, "all mankind may be saved, *by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel*." McConkie defined two kinds of LDS salvation: "1. Unconditional or *general salvation*, that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law, consists in the mere fact of being resurrected...2. Conditional or *individual salvation*, that which comes by *grace coupled with gospel obedience*, consists in receiving an inheritance in the celestial kingdom of God" (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 669). Second Nephi 25:23 in the *Book of Mormon* also says, "We know that it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*." But the Bible says, "...there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:5-6).

By definition, grace is an unearned gift, freely given and therefore it excludes works or payment of any kind. And works excludes grace because when you work for something, it is not free! So, Paul wrote, "For by *grace* are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the *gift* of God, *not of works*, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). He also wrote, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy *He saved us* by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Titus 3:5-6). Since obedience to laws and ordinances are "works of righteousness," they cannot save us! But, Christians, however, do believe in doing good works, not to earn their salvation, but as a result of it as Ephesians 2:8-10 and Titus 3:5-8, etc., explain.

LDS Apostle John Widtsoe wrote about "individual salvation" this way: "Complete salvation, which is full and eternal life, results from *man's* full endeavor to conform to the laws of life, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we often say that *men save themselves* with the aid of the Lord (*Evidences And Reconciliations*, p. 190).

Do men save themselves while Jesus provides some aid? Even before Jesus was born, the angel told Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for *HE* shall *save his people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21). The Bible also says, "*HE* came to seek and save the lost" (Lk. 19:10); "*HE* came into the world to save sinners" (I Tim. 1:15); "*HE* appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26); *HE* "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (I Pet. 2:24); "*HE* is able also to *save them unto the uttermost* that come to God by Him" (Heb. 7:25); *HE* is called our SAVIOR because *HE* saves us!

Next month we will discuss "the first principles and ordinances of the gospel" in the fourth Article of Faith. For further reading on this month's subject, we recommend my book, *What Every Mormon Should Ask*, published by Harvest House Publishers in 2000.