



Lessons From A Talk With Mormons

**by Jim Osman
Pastor/Teacher**

**Kootenai Community Church
kootenaichurch.org**

Late in the month of May, Thomas Leo called me.
“Hey, you know those Mormon elders that I told you have been visiting me the last couple of weeks?”

“Yeah.” I said.

“Well, I was talking to them tonight and I told them, ‘There are two of you and only one of me, would you mind if I ask a friend to join us?’ They said, ‘Sure.’ I told them that it was my pastor that I was going to ask to come and they were fine with that. So are you up for it?”

“Sure.” I said, not too thrilled with the idea at first. After about 20 minutes of thinking about it, I was actually looking forward to the visit.

I have had lots of run-ins with Jehovah’s Witnesses, but never had a Mormon come to my door. So I was looking forward to dropping some questions on them to see how they would respond and hoping that in the process I could have opportunity to clearly explain the gospel to them.

Thomas moderated the discussion by serving up questions to direct the conversation. We spent an hour and a half visiting with them after which I went home and began reflecting on the discussion.

I did not learn anything new, but I was reminded of a few important truths that I want to share with you.

Lesson 1: The Word of God is our most powerful and valuable tool - use it! The bulk of our discussion revolved around the authority and nature of the Bible. The goal was to get them to recognize their real view of Scripture and to admit that their confidence was not in the Bible but the Book of Mormon (BOM).

On the eve of our meeting, I realized that I had spent **no time** in the week prior brushing up on Mormon doctrine, history, literature, arguments, or practices. It had not even occurred to me to get ready in this manner. I

have to confess there was a time in my Christian life that I would have spent hours reading and studying specifically for that encounter not because I don’t know what Mormons believe, but because my approach was to attack Mormon belief rather than just present Scripture’s teaching on certain subjects. So this time around, I figured I would just keep the Scriptures the central issue and see where it goes.

I figure it is better to engage the fight in the Word of God than the word of Mormon prophets or books.

Don’t ever feel that you have to be an expert in Mormon theology to talk to a Mormon. You should have a basic working knowledge of what makes Mormonism decidedly unchristian and a false religion. Know what the Bible teaches on those subjects and you have everything you need to engage the battle and share truth.

I’ll share with you some of our conversation in hopes that this might help equip you to handle a similar situation.

The first question I asked was, “I understand that Mormons believe the Bible to be the Word of God and authoritative. Is that true?”

“Yes, we believe the Bible to be the Word of God in so far as it is translated correctly and the BOM to be another testament of Jesus Christ.” [From this point forward I will put their words in italics.]

“Are they equal in authority in your view?”

“Yes.”

“You also have The Pearl of Great Price and Doctrine and Covenants as well. You believe them to be authoritative revelations from God?”

“Yes, and the living Mormon prophet as well. He speaks for God and gives truth.”

“So then you have five different sources of divine

truth?"

"That's correct."

Now I happen to know that the Mormons do not view the Bible as equal in authority and accuracy to their other books, despite their affirmation to the contrary. So I asked them some key questions.

"So what do you do when you have a disagreement between what the Bible teaches and what the BOM teaches? For instance, the BOM says that God has a physical body and lives in heaven with His wives who are perpetually pregnant with spirit children populating this planet. Is that what you believe?"

"Yes."

"Jesus said in **John 4** that God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth. The Bible affirms over and over that God is spirit and not a man. Who do you think is right? Jesus or the BOM?"

"We believe that the BOM add clarity to the Bible. So we can turn to the BOM and it will help us to understand what the Bible means."

I pointed out that it is hard to misunderstand "God is spirit" and it seems that that cannot be explained in light of BOM teaching. So I gave another one.

"The Mormon church teaches, based upon your other sources of divine truth that Jesus is the spirit-brother of Lucifer. (Those are words, by the way, that I can hardly get to roll off my tongue, yet they are the essence of Mormon belief about Jesus.) Correct?"

"Yes."

"The Bible doesn't teach anything like that. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the uncreated Creator of Lucifer, not his spirit-brother. Which book is correct, the Bible or the BOM?"

At this point, they fell back on a little phrase they will put out on the table at any time you ask them questions like this, "*The Bible is the Word of God so far as it is accurately translated. There are errors in the Bible. It has been translated and for nearly 2,000 years has been subject to error and misinterpretation.*"

You can see how convenient that ploy can become. Anytime a contradiction surfaces, they can easily fall back on the "there are errors in the Bible, but not the BOM" dodge.

So I asked them, "How could God's Word be corrupted?"

"God gave man a free will and allows us to make decisions and to exercise our free will. He won't interfere

in that because He values our autonomy and so man has used that free will and has corrupted the text of the Bible."

[By the way, for those who believe that the Sovereignty of God always bows the knee to the "free will of man," you have to face the real theological problem of how God could act to preserve His Word. If the free will of man rules in creation, then how can God guarantee that His Word was accurately recorded to begin with, and then preserved from that point forward?] Back to the Mormons.

He continued, "*Do you have children? Well, just as you give freedom to your children to make decisions and live life, so our Heavenly Father has given His children that freedom which has resulted in corruptions to His Word.*"

I responded, "The Bible teaches that not only did God give us His Word, but He is also powerful enough to preserve His Word for us. Yes, I am a father and I do allow my children to make certain choices with their will. But if I see my children using their will to threaten something that is of value to me, I move with my will, power, and authority to impose my will on theirs to preserve that which is valuable to me. For instance, if I see a child wielding a hammer and about to pound holes in my wall, their 'freedom of choice' will quickly be superseded by my will since I have the power and authority to move and protect that which I value. I value my walls more than I value my child's freedom to do as he chooses. The Bible says that God values His Word. Yes, He did give us freedom to choose and holds us responsible for our choices, but by His power He can and does move to preserve that which He has given, in spite of man's best efforts to thwart His purposes. God values His Word and His glory more than He values allowing man to fulfill his desire to corrupt them."

Another tactical point to remember in discussions like this is whenever someone makes the claim that there are errors, contradictions, or corruptions in the text of the Bible, ask them to give you examples of some. It is never good to allow those who do not believe the Bible to define the debate in their terms. If they make the claim, they have the burden of proof to back up their claim with facts and examples. My claim was that the Bible claims to be the Word of God and that God values His Word. That is an easy claim to support since there are verses that teach that.

Their claim was that the Bible had errors. If they make a claim like that, they have the responsibility to provide evidence that it was indeed corrupted through the years. I wasn't responsible to prove that the Bible didn't have

errors, they were responsible to prove that it did.

I expressed that to them by saying, “You can’t just make the claim that the Bible is corrupted without providing some proof. Do you have any evidence that the Bible is full of errors and corruptions?” They had to admit that they had no examples that they could come up with off the top of their heads.

Along the same lines, it is important that you don’t make the same strategic error. I didn’t claim once in the whole evening that Joseph Smith was a false prophet or that the BOM was filled with errors. I believe both of those things to be true. But the minute I make the claim, I have the burden of proof.

Instead, I just endeavored to show that the BOM and the Bible contradicted each other and that Joseph Smith and the Bible contradicted each other and then asked, “Which one is true and reliable? Which one is in error?” **Without exception** they affirmed time and again that the Bible is in error and must be interpreted in light of the BOM and the teachings of Joseph Smith. That is as I expected.

At one point I asked, “Would there ever be anything you would read in the Bible that would cause you to question the BOM?”

“No. Because God can’t contradict Himself.”

“Is there anything you could read in the Bible that would cause you to question Joseph Smith or come to the conclusion that he is a false prophet?”

“No.”

They were a living example of something I have pointed out in previous articles. Anytime that anything (book, vision, experience, tradition, voice of God) is given equal authority with the Bible, the Bible will take the back seat when there is a contradiction. And there will be a contradiction! Never would they ever suggest that Joseph Smith, a Mormon prophet, or the BOM had to be interpreted or understood, or corrected in light of Scripture.

I’ll give you an illustration of how one verse in the BOM can ‘shed light’ on the whole Bible. One of the elders said, “*One time I looked up all the verses in the Bible that talked about being ‘saved by grace’ and I found them to be very confusing. I didn’t understand the Bible’s teaching on it. Then I turned to the book of Mormon and read in one passage that we are ‘saved by grace after all that we can do.’ Then it all made sense and I realized that what the Bible meant is that we are saved by grace after all*

that we can do.” It is sad beyond description that because of that one verse in the book of Mormon, this young man missed eternal life!

At one point, one of the Mormon elders said, “*The Bible has a lot of errors, but I love it and believe it with all my heart.*” There is an illogic and duplicity to that statement that is staggering!

I responded, “I would be a lot more comfortable if you would just throw the Bible out and admit that you think it is a book of errors than to sit here and give lip service to it when you really don’t believe what it teaches.” That may have been a little harsh, but I wanted them to own their **real** view of the Bible.

Lesson 2: Be courteous and gracious, but firm.

Sometimes it is difficult to walk the fine line between passion and compassion. As ambassadors for Christ, we have to be firm in our resolve and passionate about the truth. At the same time, we have to evidence a love for those we are trying to reach.

One thing I have had to learn through the years is that it is not just about strategy in the conversation. Having a good strategy is important, but we should never think that a good strategy is an end in itself. If our only focus is forcing someone into a corner, they will feel cornered and not cared for. How do we avoid coming across as too aggressive and adversarial?

First, ask a lot of questions. “Do you believe . . . ? What would you say about . . . ? Am I understanding you well? Why would you say that? How do you respond to . . . ? Am I representing you fairly? If not, please feel free to correct me if I am misrepresenting your beliefs or practices.”

Second, allow them to speak for themselves. Don’t put words in their mouth by saying, “That is what you say, but I know that you believe _____.” It might be that they misrepresent what they really believe (although I have no reason to think that these two elders were doing that). Let that be. Let them speak for themselves and work with what they give you.

Third, maintain a gracious and kind demeanor. I never came out swinging against Mormonism, the BOM or Joseph Smith. There is no doubt that they walked away from the meeting understanding full well that I didn’t believe the BOM was God’s Word or that Joseph Smith was His prophet. But I didn’t have to engage in bombastic name calling to communicate that point.

Lesson 3: Let the results rest with God. I have prayed for those young men several times since our

meeting a few weeks ago. They didn't walk away from the meeting as believers in Jesus Christ. Quite frankly, it is not my duty to make them believers. It is my duty to share the gospel. It is God who causes them to be born again to a living hope (**1 Peter 1:3**) and brings someone to salvation (**James 1:18**). So we just share the truth and then sleep soundly leaving the results to God.

Lesson 4: Learn from your mistakes. After any conversation like this one, I always sit down to reflect upon what happened. I ask myself, "What did I do well? What do I need to work on? Where did I fail to communicate truth? What piece of knowledge do I need to get under my belt before the next time? What topics did I feel were over my head?"

I'm interested in improving. So I find a couple things that I need to work on for next time and then I start working on them and make sure that I remember them the next time I am in the fray.

I don't want you to think that I did swimmingly well in this conversation so let me share with you some of my mistakes.

First, I didn't use Scripture enough. We spent a lot of time talking about the authority, reliability, interpretation, and teachings of the Bible, but after an hour, we had not looked at a single passage. Although I quoted the words of Scripture every chance I got, they would have been far better served to have opened up the Bible and looked at some specific passages. I won't make that mistake the next time.

It is the Word of God that the Spirit of God uses to bring conviction, create faith, and cause us to be born again. (**James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:22-2:1**) The Spirit can't do that if we don't let the Word out of the cage!

I spent far too much time in defending the Bible and should have spent more time in looking at the text itself and allowing them to see what it says. I do this in my discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses - in fact, it is my cardinal rule! I don't know why I dropped the ball on this occasion.

Tactically speaking, by doing this, I gave them the upper hand. I allowed them to simply explain the Bible by appealing to the BOM. That is far easier for them to do when they are not staring at the words on the printed page in front of them. It allowed the discussion to degenerate to "my interpretation vs. your interpretation," which was another interesting discussion I'll save for some other time. It is very difficult to make a lame interpretation walk when your eyes are chained to the

words of the text in their context.

Second, I should have spent more time on the doctrines of salvation. I had to rush this into the discussion at the end and was only able to give about 5 minutes to the issue. After an hour had passed, we were still talking about how the BOM contradicted the Bible and one of the elders said, "*We need to get going. We have another appointment in about 10 minutes.*"

With those words, I felt my heart sink because we had not even got to the central issue - the gospel. Thomas deftly changed the direction of the conversation by saying, "Let's talk about the issue of salvation. If I ask you, what do I have to do to go to heaven, what would you say?"

They explained how their confidence in salvation rests on accepting what the BOM says and on Joseph Smith being a true prophet. They candidly admitted, "*In order for you to accept our answer about how to get to heaven, you have to accept the teachings of the BOM, which you don't seem willing to do.*"

I could see that they were ready and anxious to get to their next appointment and so I asked, "Can you give 30 seconds to explain to you what the Bible says about salvation so you can compare it to what you just told us?" They agreed and so I unloaded the apple cart on them in about 30 seconds.

Next time, I will try to remember to ask how long we have for the discussion so I can give priority to the priorities. Since the gospel is the "power of God unto salvation," (**Romans 1:16**) I should have looked ahead and budgeted our time accordingly.

Learn what you can from every encounter, and then go out and have another one! There is nothing to fear from those trapped in error. With the light of God's Word, you can walk through any man's field. Use the Word, give the gospel, trust God, repeat.

Without Wax-



Mormon teaching regarding God

“In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it.” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 349)

Isaiah 44:6-8 - ...And there is no God besides Me....Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.”

“The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s...” (Doctrine and Covenants, 130:22)

John 4:24 - God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

*“God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man. . .” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 345).
“Remember that God, our heavenly Father, was perhaps once a child, and mortal like we ourselves, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement; has moved forward and overcome, until he has arrived at the point where He now is.” (Journal of Discourses, 1:123)*

Psalms 50:21 - These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes.

“As man is, God once was: as God is, man may become.”

- Mormon Prophet Lorenzo Snow, (The Gospel Through the Ages, 105-106).

Genesis 3:5 - For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Spoken by Satan)

Isaiah 14:13 - I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. (Spoken by Satan)