

constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. (TPJS, p. 370, June 16, 1844)

But, if Joseph and the Elders had preached a plurality of Gods for fifteen years, since 1829, why did God wait until 1839, *ten years later*, to give the above quoted revelation (D&C 121:28)?

Contrary to what he said, a computer search of *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Journal of Discourses*, LDS scriptures, etc., etc., has turned up nothing that would verify Joseph's claim. There is a complete absence of LDS teaching on the plurality of Gods prior to 1839.

The alleged revelation of 1839 opened the door to new and contradictory teachings on the nature of God that put even more distance between the LDS church and Bible-believing Christians.

We used to agree that God the Father is a personage of spirit

In agreement with Christians throughout the ages, the 1835 D&C taught that God the Father is not a man but is a *personage of spirit*:

But having the idea that he is *not man* that he can lie, it gives power to the minds of men to exercise faith in him (Lecture 3:22, p. 40).

We shall, in this lecture speak of the Godhead... The Father being a *personage of spirit*... The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a *personage of tabernacle*... (Lecture 5:2, pp. 52–53)

In all the Standard Works (LDS scriptures) and other official publications of the LDS Church through 1839, there is no mention of God the Father being anything but an *invisible personage of spirit* (1835 D&C, p. 53, 62; Colossians 1:15, JST; 1 Timothy 1:17, JST; John 4:24; Luke 24:37, 39, JST; Alma 18:26–28, 22:7–11).

The Bible and non-LDS Christian churches have always agreed with the original LDS teaching that God the Father is not the same kind of being as man but that He is a *personage of spirit* (John 4:24).

What happened?

Sometime between 1839 and 1842, Joseph Smith

began to teach that God the Father had a body of flesh and bones:

That which is without body, parts and passions is nothing. There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones (TPJS, Section Four 1839–42 p.181).

Notice that it was after teaching, before 1842, that God the Father had a body that Joseph allegedly received a revelation from God, in 1843, that:

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's (D&C 130:22, April 2, 1843).

This event in the evolution of LDS theology was just another step further removed from authentic Christianity.

These contradictory new teachings and the original LDS teachings on the nature of God were allowed to coexist in the D&C until 1921, after which the *Lectures on Faith* were left out. Today, those 70 pages, which were the *Doctrine of the Doctrine and Covenants*, are no longer considered canonized scripture by the LDS Church.

How can we reconcile our differences?

Could we reclaim that which we had in common in 1835, which is so basic to the Christian faith? Accepting again those attributes of God about which we once agreed would be difficult because it would require many other serious changes in current Mormon theology. But it would be a good starting point. After all, Joseph Smith did teach that those very attributes of God were “unchangeable” and “necessary” for salvation. Bible-believing Christians everywhere agree that to know God is eternal life (John 17:3). And we dare not try to revise Him as if He were our creation. He is our *Creator*.

— by Tom Jones

You may have honest questions about these issues which deserve sound answers that make sense. If you would like to ask a question or want additional information or documentation, contact:

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We used to agree



What happened?

An understandable concern expressed by Latter-day Saints¹, is that non-LDS Christians² do not consider the LDS faith to be truly Christian.

What most folks from both groups don't realize, however, is that Latter-day Saints and non-LDS Christians used to agree on many of the doctrines which now divide them.

Early LDS scripture taught, and Mormons had a testimony of, a number of the historically essential beliefs that would support them as a part of the true Christian faith. Let's examine a few of them:

We used to agree that God has always been God

In the first edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*³ (1835 D&C), the *Doctrine* consisted of seventy 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*⁵—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 *You can purchase a photocopy of the original publication under the title of "Joseph Smith Begins His Work," Vol. 2, from Deseret Book Store (800-453-4532). It also contains "A Book of Commandments," the 1833 predecessor of the D&C.*

4 *Joseph Smith Translation*

5 *All italics in quotes added.*

6 *Book of Mormon*

(See also D&C 20:17, 28; Moroni⁶ 8:18; Mormon⁶ 9:9, 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 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. Now, he was dependent on *another God*, his father, to bring him into being and sustain him (*Search These Commandments, Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide*, 1985, p. 152).

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 from his own faith and scriptures (apostatized).

Ironically, many Latter-day Saints profess to believe both 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 Christian body.

We used to agree 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)

The current D&C and the *Book of Mormon* still have remnants of the original LDS 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... (Alma⁶ 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?

On March 20, 1839, God allegedly 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]