

# **THE GOD OF MORMONISM**

**A Comparison of the LDS and  
Judeo-Christian Concepts of God**

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For Vicki...  
May her search for the true God of Israel  
bring her all that her heart desires.

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## Introduction

During my college days at Brigham Young University I was once eating lunch in the cafeteria and happened to overhear a conversation between two young men sitting on the table next to me. The conversation consisted of one man, who was clearly a member of the LDS church, trying to convert the other young man who apparently belonged to a different faith. I couldn't help but overhear the conversation as it weaved in and out of various religious topics. At one point the discussion came to the topic of deity and whether or not Mormons are Christians. The young man who was not LDS shot out a criticism of the LDS view of God, stating that Mormons simply believe different things about God than other Christians do and therefore Mormons are not Christians. The young LDS lad was clearly getting frustrated by this point and managed a reply that not only showed his frustration, but also his lack of understanding of LDS doctrine and the criticism being offered. He boldly blurted out something to the effect of,

*“That’s ridiculous. It doesn’t matter what definition you use to define a Christian, that definition will apply to Mormons as well. Mormons don’t view God any differently than any other religion.”*

All respectable motives aside, I couldn't help but wonder if this clearly incorrect statement did more damage than good to the discussion at hand. The non-Mormon must have been left in somewhat of a quandary. Either what he had been told about Mormons was incorrect and Mormons really did hold to the same beliefs about God and Christ as other churches, or this Mormon he was talking to didn't understand the teachings of his own faith very well and therefore couldn't be relied upon for an accurate view of Mormonism, let alone Christianity or religion in general. In any case, it placed a damper on the discussion that prohibited further progress. The non-Mormon was left unimpressed with either the discussion itself or with Mormonism in general. The discussion soon ended and the two friends shook hands and went their separate ways. As they parted ways, I speculated how the conversation might have ended had our LDS friend understood and boldly defended the differences and strengths concerning the LDS concept of God.

Since its inception, the LDS view of God has come under widespread debate and has been one of the key focal points of criticism against Mormon theology. Indeed, as illustrated in the story above, it has been one of the rallying cries of other Christian churches in an effort to point out that Mormons aren't really Christians at all. The basic logic behind this rally has been to suggest that all true Christians view God in a certain way and that those who view God differently must, therefore, not be true Christians. As silly and narrow-minded as this argument seems, it has gained great strength and favor among various Christian denominations and anti-Mormon groups.

Unfortunately, most Latter-day Saints have not spent the time to truly delve into these differences or the LDS concept of God in general. Many Mormons themselves tend to not understand the great significance of the LDS doctrines concerning deity. As a result, we are both unable to adequately explain these differences to others and, perhaps more importantly, we miss out on some of the most important and meaningful doctrines revealed to us through the prophet Joseph Smith.

The fact that the LDS view of God is very different from the rest of the religious world can hardly be disputed. Mormonism truly stands all but alone in its view of God. With boldness bordering on audacity Joseph Smith once stated:

*There are but a very few beings on earth who understand rightly the character of God. The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come, as respects their relationship to God...If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. (Joseph Smith, King Follett Sermon, Millennial Star, vol. xxiii, p. 245)*

*I will prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is. I am going to inquire after God; for I want you all to know Him, and to be familiar with Him; and if I am bringing you to a knowledge of Him, all persecutions against me ought to cease. You will then know that I am His servant; for I speak as one having authority. (History of the Church, Vol.6, Ch.14, p.305)*

This volume was written to explain the basics of the LDS concept of God, how this concept differs from traditional views of God, and why the LDS view of God is so far superior to those provided by other religions. It is an attempt to take one of the most fundamental aspects of all western religions - the question of "What kind of being is God" - and show the absolute superiority of the principles proposed by a young farm boy from upper New York when compared to those espoused by most of the western world.

In this effort, it should be noted that this work is not intended to cover all of these topics in extreme detail. This would require a work of unwieldy size and content. Rather, it is intended to give the reader an introduction to the concepts of deity as taught by the scriptures and leaders of the LDS church. It is hoped that the reader will be encouraged by this volume to take the basic concepts discussed here and, through further study, thought, and prayer, add more detail and understanding of these views on their own. It is important to understand that this work is intended to be an introduction to these topics and should be viewed in that light.

## **The Importance Of Knowing God**

The Savior has said,

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*  
(*Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48, underline added*)

This scripture tells us a tremendous amount about the nature and character of God as well as our relationship to him. The "even as" part of this scripture has been emphasized because it would appear that in order to obey this commandment, we must first come to know just how our Father in heaven is perfect. What is it that makes God perfect? It seems that getting to know God would be somewhat of a prerequisite to becoming perfect "even as" he is perfect.

In addition, this scripture tells us that it is possible for us mere mortals to become as perfect as God. If this is not the case, then why would Christ make such a statement to begin with? It suggests a path or goal for us that is either 1) both possible and worthwhile to achieve or 2) impossible and therefore meaningless to us. That said, it seems reasonable to assume that the Savior meant what he said in this statement and that, therefore, we should spend some time and effort trying to understand just what it means when we say that God is perfect. Gaining a greater understanding of God seems to be the only way for us to become perfect, even as He is perfect.

Another issue this scripture raises concerns what it means for us mere mortals to become perfect, even as God is perfect. If it really is possible for a mortal being to become as perfect as God is, then, by using fairly simple reasoning, would that not imply that a mortal can become a god himself? It is reasonable to assume that God has the power to make other gods, and if so, why would he choose to do anything else for us? The idea of “perfection” implies absoluteness, completeness, or nothing wanting. Assuming we can become as perfect as God is, as this scripture implies, what would be the difference between God and us at that point? Again, if we take this commandment by the Savior as a literal possibility, as opposed to meaningless nonsense, then we must be open to the idea that God’s mortal children can become gods themselves by sharing in all the attributes of glory that God himself enjoys. This, therefore, should become the goal of all professed Christians – to become even as God himself is - perfect. Again, in order for us to even make such an attempt, we must first come to understand just how God is perfect in the first place.

The last point to note from this line of reasoning is that if it is possible to become like God, as the Savior proposes, is it possible that others have walked this path before us? In other words, given all eternity in the past, is it more reasonable to assume that we are the first group of mortals that God has commanded to become perfect even as he is perfect, or is it more reasonable to assume that God has created other worlds previous to this one and that other mortals may have actually already accomplished godhood by becoming as perfect as God? It seems both narrow minded and perhaps even arrogant for us to assume that we are the only ones in both time and space to whom God has extended this offer of godly perfection. Hence, it seems more reasonable to assume that others in the universe have already become perfect, and therefore, have already become gods themselves.

From this one verse alone we can derive some of the greatest spiritual truths known to man. From this one verse we can come to all of the following reasonable conclusions:

1. That the Savior commanded mankind to become as perfect as God is.
2. That man may actually become as perfect as God is – that this is a real possibility and not just a meaningless concept.
3. That we cannot obey this commandment without an understanding of just how and why God is perfect.
4. That this perfection implies the ability to become gods ourselves.
5. That it is reasonable to assume that God has provided other opportunities in both time and space for other mortals to become perfect and that some of those have actually succeeded in this endeavor, thus allowing for the likelihood of multiple perfect beings or gods existing in the universe.

Interestingly enough, all of these conclusions are distinctly LDS in nature. They are not commonly taught in any other major Christian denomination. This is plain and simple reasoning based on the plain and simple teachings of Jesus Christ. It is not only easy to understand and derive from the teachings of Christ, but it is easy to accept for all those who honestly have faith that God loves his children, wants the best for them, and has the power to give it to them. What would be better for us than becoming a god ourselves? What more could God ever want for us than to become as he is? These are some of the great teachings from LDS theology that differ from other religions in significant ways.

Christ has also said,

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)*

Here we have another example of just how important it is to know the attributes and characteristics of both God the Father and his son Jesus Christ. Christ equates this knowledge of God with “life eternal,” which is the ultimate goal of all things Christian. Joseph Smith, commenting on this scripture, had the following to say about the great importance of knowing God:

*Here, then, is eternal life - to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 346-347)*

*If any man does not know God, and inquires what kind of a being he is,—if he will search diligently his own heart—if the declaration of Jesus and the apostles be true, he will realize that he has not eternal life; for there can be eternal life on no other principle. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.344)*

For Joseph Smith, understanding and comprehending who God is, how he became a god, and our relationship to him, were paramount to our understanding of the gospel itself. According to both the Bible and Joseph Smith, without this understanding of God, we cannot have eternal life. Of this the prophet also stated,

*I am going to inquire after God because I want you all to know God and be familiar with him. If I can get you to know Him, I can bring you unto him.*

*If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves...It is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how he became God...The first principle of the gospel is to know for a certainty the character of God, and that we may converse with him. (The King Follett Discourse)*

As the scripture in John indicates, to know God is life eternal. Surely only good can come from an honest, soul-searching attempt to learn about and come to know the being that is our God. Any truths we may find along this path will not only teach us about God, but will also teach us about ourselves.

## ***Two Types Of “Knowing”***

Given the significance of knowing God, it is important for us to understand that there are at least two different types of knowing someone. The first is to know about them, meaning, their characteristics and attributes. This type of knowledge deals with knowing the “facts” about a person. The second type of knowing is far more intimate and deals more with knowing a person’s personality and qualities on a more personal basis. For example, I may know who the President of the United States is. I may know what he looks like, what he does, how he became the president, and many other important matters surrounding his characteristics and the nature of his position and person. This is all important and worthwhile information. Yet, it should be conceded that I do not know the President of the United States on a personal basis. I have never met him or even spoken with him. Hence, I don’t personally know his personality or character.

Although both types of knowing a person are important and worthwhile, the first can be learned from a distance while the second requires far more intimate contact and communication with that person. The same is true of our relationship with God. In this work we will be largely discussing the first type of knowing God – his characteristics and the “facts” surrounding what type of being he is. However, in order to discover his true character the reader will likely have to meet God and converse with him directly over some period of time. This type of relationship must be built via personal contact with God – a difficult and perhaps lifelong pursuit.

Of necessity we will only cover the less personal attributes of God in this work. However, as Joseph Smith implies, understanding these attributes should help us tremendously in our efforts to find God and understand him on a more personal level. I encourage the reader to go beyond the “facts” found in this work and try to someday meet God face to face and know him in the fullest sense of the word.

## **The God Of The World**

In order for us to more fully understand and appreciate the significance of the LDS view of God, it is helpful to understand how other religions generally view God and how LDS doctrine compares to those views, especially those of the so called “western religions” such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It is with these religions that Mormonism is most commonly associated and compared. It is also from these religions that the greatest criticisms of the LDS view of God originate and are perpetuated. This is especially true of Christianity. Most of those who actively criticize Mormonism belong to some Christian faith or other. It is also with the concepts espoused by these religions that our most meaningful comparisons will arise. Hence, most of our comparisons in this work will focus on the beliefs of these western religions, especially Christianity.

It should be recognized in passing that most eastern religions tend to differ quite a bit from western religions respecting their views on deity. In fact, it has been debated whether or not certain eastern religions, such as Confucianism and Taoism, should even be considered religions. The argument has been made that since these religions don't really worship a specific God or gods, they should perhaps be more accurately described as philosophies and not as religions at all. Likewise, there are other religions, such as the religions of India, that believe in a great many gods, each with a different personality and role to play. There are also religions that worship nature or even a human being still on earth in mortal form. Needless to say, some of these religions don't compare well with the views of Mormonism. Indeed, it may be difficult to even strike much of a comparison at all between LDS views regarding deity and those of various religions of the world.

Interestingly enough, the religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all have very similar concepts of deity. If one studies world religions, these three religions will generally be grouped together not only because of their geographic proximity to each other, but also because of their doctrinal similarities and, in particular, their beliefs about God. In fact, a common term used to describe the beliefs held by these religions is "Judeo-Christian," indicating the overlapping characteristics and similarities of each religion. Indeed, for the most part, if you define the basic attributes and characteristics of God according to any one of these religions, you've come very close to defining it for all three religions. Hence, the definition of God discussed hereafter is intended to describe in basic terms the God of all three of these great religions. Although some details and specifics may vary, the basic attributes of deity discussed below generally apply to all three religions, and hence most of the Western and Middle Eastern world.

That said, Christian philosophers and theologians seem to have taken this basic, shared view of God to greater levels of detail over the centuries than either Islam or Judaism. This is not to say that Islam and Judaism haven't carefully considered or written about their view of God in great detail. They most certainly have. Yet, it seems to be within Christianity that the greatest amount of written material and thought concerning the specific attributes and characteristics of God are recorded. Well-known Christian philosophers such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Anselm, and others have added much detail and reflection to the modern definition of God as commonly held by these great western religions. It should be noted that although there are scriptures that can be used to support the beliefs of modern Christianity, it could be easily argued that it is upon the thoughts and writings of men such as these that Christianity has based its modern view of God, much more so than from the Holy Scriptures themselves or any other professed revelations from God. For example, one author described the development of the Judeo-Christian view of God as follows:

*This rather majestic idea of God was slowly developed over the centuries by great western theologians such as Augustine, Boethius, Bonaventure, Anselm and Aquinas. (William L. Rowe, Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction, p. 6)*

Again, although there are scriptures that can be used to support this view of God, it is important to understand that it is largely from the works of these "great western theologians" that the basic attributes of God, as well as the arguments proposing God's very existence, can be found and explained in great detail. For the most part, it is from the minds of these religious philosophers

that the God of Judeo-Christianity finds both its origin and definition. This is important to understand as we proceed.

## ***The Attributes Of God***

As already discussed, the religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all share certain common beliefs regarding the attributes of God. Volumes have been written about these attributes. As already mentioned, the purpose here is not so much to give a detailed account of each attribute or the history of how each came into common belief. Rather, the purpose of this section is to give a brief description of each attribute as it is most commonly accepted in each of these religions. It is hoped that this will serve as a good list for comparison's sake with LDS views regarding these same attributes. For a more complete understanding of these attributes and characteristics, I refer the reader to the original works written by the great thinkers of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism as well as the many commentaries written about them. It is there you will find the detail of each attribute and how each became popular thinking in modern theology.

That said, we will be calling upon various non-LDS works and authors as we try to paint the picture of the God of Judeo-Christian tradition. Most of these references come from basic textbooks of philosophy commonly found in university level studies. We will start our discussion with just such a reference. The following comment can be viewed as an introduction to the Judeo-Christian concept of God:

*...God has no location in some spot or region of physical space. He is purely a spiritual being...God is conceived of as a supremely good being, separate from and independent of the world, all-powerful, all-knowing, and the creator of the universe. Two other features that were ascribed to God by the great theologians are self-existence and eternity.  
(William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction*, pp.6- 7)*

Each of these attributes deserves some attention in order to more fully understand the ramifications of this view of God. The following sections outline each of these basic attributes of deity as they are commonly accepted and taught among the major western religions. However, in order to understand the philosophical origins and nature of these attributes, it is important that we understand the underlying principles that created these thoughts in the first place.

The fundamental origin of each of the following attributes of God is the basic belief that God must be supreme in every conceivable way. For example, in Saint Anselm's *Proslogium II*, he expressed the idea of God as "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived."

*What this idea says is that if a certain being is God, then no possible being can be greater than it; or conversely, if a certain being is such that it is even possible for there to be a greater being than it, then that being is not God. (William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction*, p.34)*

It is important to understand what this definition of God means and how it relates to the attributes generally associated with God. According to these great theologians, not only must

God be the ultimate conceivable being in every way, but to them, any being that falls short of this lofty view of deity in any way, cannot, according to this definition, be God. For many of these theologians, this provided a rather black and white view of God. For many, either God fits this description of the greatest possible being or God simply does not exist. One author expressed this view in the following manner:

*[The idea of God elaborated by the traditional western theologians] is the major idea of God in the three great religions of western civilization: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. ...we shall call this view of God the theistic idea of God. To be a theist, then, is to believe in the existence of a supremely good being, creator of but separate from and independent of the world, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal...and self-existent. An atheist is anyone who believes that the theistic God does not exist, whereas an agnostic is someone who has considered the theistic idea of God but believes neither in the existence nor in the nonexistence or the theistic God.*

*We have just used the terms “theist,” “atheist,” and “agnostic” in a restricted or narrow sense. In the broader sense, a theist is someone who believes in the existence of a divine being or beings, even if his idea of the divine is quite different from the idea of God we have been describing. (William L. Rowe, Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction, p.14)*

Unfortunately, the most unsympathetic critics of LDS theology tend to use the narrow definitions of theism and Christianity when condemning the views of Mormonism. It should be fully understood that these are narrow definitions and that other views exist that are certainly worthy of consideration.

It is clear that this “theistic” definition of God does not originate from the scriptures or professed revelations of God to man. Rather, it is the creation of various theologians, philosophers if you will, and portrays merely a view of what they believed God should be. For some reason the great western theologians felt a need to define God in this ultimate sense. They seem to have wanted God to be something completely different from anything earthly or mortal. Hence we find that most of the attributes credited to God are derived from this basic concept or definition of God as the greatest conceivable being. It did not matter that there was little or no information directly from God himself concerning these issues. What mattered to the theologians was that God had to fit this description of being greater than anything of which we could possibly conceive. It was vital to their definition of God that he was not lacking in any sense whatsoever.

As we proceed with explanations of each of the following attributes of God, we will see how this basic concept of a supreme being helped to shape and define the Judeo-Christian view of God and why this view has sometimes been described as being little more or less than “the philosophies of men mingled with scripture.” It is fundamentally a man-made, philosophical view of God as opposed to a scriptural view or one that we have learned directly from God himself. Hence, it is important to understand that the goal of most western theologians was not necessarily to find the true and living God by personal experience or as it can be derived from holy writ. The goal of these men was to determine if an ultimately supreme being, meaning “that than which none greater can be conceived,” could actually be defined and shown to exist in reality as opposed to merely in our minds as only a thought or concept. For all intents and

purposes, it has been little more than a mind game created and promoted by the prominent thinkers of western religion. It is an “educated guess” concerning what God might be like based on what kind of being various theologians thought he should be like. It is no wonder that this concept of God has come under such scrutiny and controversy over the centuries. It is no wonder that many rational people have difficulty believing in the existence of such a God.

The following sections delve into more detail regarding each of the major attributes of deity as defined by these theologians and found within the theologies of the major western religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. We will specifically discuss ten different attributes as commonly defined by the great theologians of western religion. These ten attributes or characteristics are:

1. Perfect goodness
2. Self-existence (no cause for God’s existence)
3. Creator of the universe “Ex-Nihilo” or from “nothing”
4. Immutability (inability to change)
5. Not able to be acted upon, including no emotion or feeling
6. Omnipotence (all powerful)
7. Omnipresence (everywhere present)
8. Incorporeality (no material body or parts)
9. Omniscience (all knowing)
10. Timelessness (existing outside of time)

Whenever serious discussions occur concerning the type of being God is, these ten attributes usually find their way into the debate. They serve as somewhat of a cornerstone for defining God according to the major religions of western society.

We’ll begin by giving a brief definition of each of these attributes as most commonly described and advanced by western religions. After this foundation has been established, we’ll discuss some of the traditional difficulties involved with this view of God. Then we will show how LDS theology compares to these concepts and their associated challenges.

### **Perfectly Good**

One of the most basic beliefs about God is that he is perfectly good. Using the foundation expressed by Anslem and others, because God must be the ultimate of all things, it is believed that He must, therefore, also be the ultimate in goodness. In this manner, and following the logic of the theologians, if we can conceive of anything that is good in anyway, God must be the ultimate representative of that thing, for that is how the theologians defined God to begin with.

In order to understand the views held by traditional theologians regarding what it means to be perfectly good, we must first define the terms “good” and “evil” as they are most commonly used. As they are most commonly used, both terms simply refer to the joy or suffering experienced by those beings that have the ability to experience joy and suffering. For example, there is little or no evidence that a rock can experience joy or suffering in any way. Hence, to break a single rock into two pieces is generally not considered an evil thing in and of itself.

However, to separate the arm or leg of a human being, or pull the wings off of a butterfly, that can, and in all likelihood will, experience pain and suffering from the experience, would probably be considered by most theologians as an evil thing. The term “evil” then, has commonly been defined as instances of human and animal suffering. Likewise, the term “good” has been commonly defined as instances of human and animal joy or happiness.

From these basic definitions of good and evil the theologians of western society have concluded that God must be a perfectly good being and, as such, will eliminate all the sorrow and pain that he can while promoting the greatest amount of joy or happiness that he can. It is generally believed that this is one of the basic roles of God. It is part of God’s very nature as the greatest conceivable being to be perfectly good. He is the eternal promoter of that which is good and the eternal eliminator of that which is evil.

We will discuss the ramifications of this attribute in conjunction other attributes of God and the reality of the world around us later in this work. For now, suffice it to say that the Judeo-Christian view of God generally includes the concept of absolute goodness as defined above.

### **Self-Existent – No Cause For God’s Existence**

One of the greatest proponents of the concept of self-existence was Saint Anselm. In short, this concept attempts to answer the question of why or how God exists in the first place. It involves the notion that everything in the universe exists because of one of three reasons:

1. Because of something else,
2. Because of nothing, or
3. Because of itself

Most things of which we are aware in life exist because of something else. For example, it is fairly easy to determine how a tree or car or baby deer came into being. We know of natural laws that cause such things to come into existence. We can generally say that these things came into existence because of something else. However, from a purely theological point of view, it becomes more difficult to determine why or how God came into existence.

Again, in order to understand the basic reasoning of the great western theologians in this regard, we must understand their underlying premise of defining God as that than which none greater can be conceived. If God came into existence because of some event or being external to himself, then it follows that God would be dependant upon that event or being for His existence. The theologians simply asked the question, “Can we conceive of a being that is not dependant upon anything else for its existence?” The answer they came up with is that we clearly can conceive of a being that is not dependant on something else for its existence. They also decided that God would be a greater being if he didn’t depend on something else for his existence. Dependency was viewed as a potential weakness or at least as something less desirable. Hence, according to the definition given to God as that than which none greater can be conceived, God’s existence must not have been dependant upon anything else. God must therefore be self-existent. Anselm’s reasoning can be explained as follows:

*Unlike the table, the tree, the mountain or the lake, the supremely great and good being cannot have its existence due to another, Anselm reasons, for then it would be dependant for its existence on that other thing and, consequently, would not be the supreme being. Whatever is supreme over all things cannot be (or have been) dependent for its existence on any of them. The existence of the supreme being, therefore, must be explained by nothing or by itself. (William L. Rowe, Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction, p. 9)*

Notice how Anselm is basing his entire conclusion on his definition of what it means to be God. His first premise is almost always to take this view of what God should be – that than which none greater can be conceived – and from that foundation create conclusions concerning the type of being God must be. Anselm goes on to propose that nothing exists without cause or reason and that, therefore, there must be some reason for God’s existence. This led to the conclusion that God must somehow exist because of himself. In other words, something, we don’t know what, about the very nature of God makes it so that he exists and always has existed.

*Anselm does not profess to understand what it is within the divine nature that accounts for God’s existence. Nor does he understand just how a being’s nature might provide the explanation of that being’s existence. All that he professes to be sure of is that the existence of the supreme being is due to the supreme being itself. He does not mean, of course, that the supreme being brought itself into existence. For it would then have to exist before it existed in order to bring itself into existence, and clearly that is impossible. Moreover, as we noted earlier, eternity is one of God’s characteristics, so he clearly did not come into existence at a certain time. (William L. Rowe, Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction, p. 10)*

Duly noting Anselm’s questionable objection to God’s existence being caused by nothing, traditional theology teaches that God is self-existent in that he has always existed and that somehow he is responsible for his existence. Nothing created God or caused him to come into existence and his existence cannot be attributed to “nothing.” This is what it generally means to be self-existent according to the great western theologians.

### **Creator “Ex Nihilo” Or From “Nothing”**

The common belief of western theology concerning the creation of heaven and earth is that God created these things out of nothing. In other words, there was some time in the past when nothing but God existed, not even the basic elements or empty space itself. For most western religions, God is completely responsible for the creation of all matter and spirit, whether living or not, including all associated attributes.

As we will see in later sections, this creates no small problem for western theology when it comes to understanding why things are the way they are. If all things are the absolute creation of God, many questions arise concerning why God chose to make the universe in the way that he did. It is easy, for example, to conceive of a better world than this one and a universe that makes more sense than the one in which we live. In addition, it is difficult for our finite minds to grasp the idea of there being absolutely nothing. What would it be like if nothing existed except God? To some extent, it seems to beg the question of what it means to exist in the first place.

We will discuss some of these dilemmas in greater detail later in this work. For now, suffice it to say that the most common belief of western theology is that all things in the universe find their origin, their attributes, and even their very existence in time and space in God. They are wholly dependant upon Him for literally every attribute they possess, including existence itself.

### **Immutability – Unchangeable**

Simply stated, this attribute of God suggests that God has never and will never change in any way. The concept of divine immutability, or God being unchangeable, can perhaps best be explained by once again referring to the idea of God as “that than which none greater can be conceived.” As with many of these attributes, the concept of God being immutable has its origin in this man-made definition.

The basic argument proposed generally deals with why a completely perfect being would ever change. If God is and always has been the ultimate in all things – the greatest being that there can possibly be – then why would he change in any way? Any change God would make in himself, it is argued, could only fall into one of two categories: Either God is changing to improve himself or God is making a meaningless change. Neither of these two options were very appealing to the great western thinkers. For if God could experience a change that would make him better in some way, that would suggest that there was a time that he was not the greatest possible being. In other words, we could conceive of a being that was greater than God in some way. This, according the definition assigned to God, is a contradiction and therefore cannot be true. Likewise, if God changed in some way that was meaningless, questions are raised as to the purpose or reasons for this change. Does an ultimately perfect being do meaningless things? Referring back to the definition of God, it is conceivable that a being who did only meaningful things would be better than a being that also did meaningless things. Hence, once again we can conceive of a being that is greater than God and, therefore, that being cannot be God, at least not under this definition of God.

It should be noted that this idea of immutability includes all changes of any kind in both time and space. In other words, there was never a time that God was any different in any way than He is right now. Likewise, there will never be a time in the future that God will be any different than he is right now. Not one single attribute of God can ever change in any way or God, under this definition, would not be the God of Judeo-Christian tradition.

It should be clear by now that this definition of God as that than which none greater can be conceived has more or less “painted God into a corner,” so to speak. It leaves very little room for God to be anything other than what the philosophers have said he must be. Again, this definition of God did not necessarily come about from any scriptural text or from any professed revelation to any of these great western thinkers. Rather, it came about mostly as the result of centuries of philosophical debate concerning what a “greatest possible” or “ultimate” being would be like.

### **Not Acted Upon - No Emotion Or Feeling**

Closely related to immutability, another attribute that can be directly associated with the Judeo-Christian definition of God is that an ultimately supreme being would never react to anything. Rather, He would only act. In other words, if any other force or being in the universe could affect God so as to cause him to react in some way, then God cannot be the ultimate being. For God to be affected in this manner would imply that God was dependant upon some other being or influence for that reaction. The greatest possible being, it is proposed, would never be dependant upon some other influence than Himself. Hence, God does not react in any way. He only acts.

This again creates a series of inconsistencies that are difficult to address. For example, if God does not react to anything then we must ask whether or not prayer is a real power and makes any difference at all. We must also ask if God possesses certain attributes such as compassion or empathy. Having compassion generally suggests being affected by another influence outside of your own. If one has compassion on a hurt dog, for example, then one is clearly reacting to an external situation rather than merely acting. Likewise, this same logic applies to other scriptural attributes generally associated with God. In fact, love itself would seem to fall into this category.

The point to be made is that under this definition of God, he is not allowed to react in any way or feel passions or emotions of any kind that imply being influenced by anything or anyone outside of himself.

### **Omnipotence – All Powerful**

Among the great western theologians, one of the greatest advocates for the concept of God being omnipotent or all-powerful was Thomas Aquinas. Once again using the basic definition of God as the greatest possible being, Aquinas and other religious philosophers proposed that this being must be omnipotent in the highest conceivable way. This is not to say that God can do anything, for there are some things that are impossible even to God, such as logical contradictions. Even for the great western theologians it is impossible, for example, for God to create a perfectly round square or a married bachelor. However, these exceptions were not viewed as a limitation to God's omnipotence. They are simply impossibilities. As Aquinas once explained:

*...whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is more appropriate to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them. (St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1, Q 25, Art. 3. in The Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York Random House, 1945)*

However, for the most part, the realm of logical contradictions is the only aspect of impossibility that falls outside of God's omnipotence. According to the most commonly held view of God, God is not bound to any of the natural laws of space or time.

*That God is independent of the world means that he is not governed by any of the physical laws according to which the universe operates. But it means much more than*

*this. It also means that God is not subject to the laws of space and time. (William L. Rowe, Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction, p. 12)*

This is simply to say that the God of western theology is not bound by any natural laws. He is only bound by the laws of logic and contradiction. This allows God to do anything that is not a logical contradiction. Hence, any physical or natural laws that may govern the universe and to which we mortals are subject, have no affect on God whatsoever. God may manipulate these laws as he sees fit, so long as it obeys the laws of logic. In fact, it would be appropriate to say that the God of western theology created all of the physical laws of the universe and that he, therefore, could have created them to be different than they currently are. This is generally what it means for God to be omnipotent.

### What Is A Miracle?

This definition of omnipotence has great bearing on what is generally considered to be a miracle and what is not. For most of western religion a miracle is defined as something that contradicts natural law. It is not simply something that cannot be explained with our current knowledge of science. Rather, it is something that will never be able to be explained by science for it contradicts the very laws that science must obey.

Bringing this down to practical terms, suppose a helicopter flies over some remote jungle in Africa. The local natives seeing this helicopter for the first time have no idea what this flying monster is. They may suppose that this is a miracle because, to them, it seems to defy the natural laws of which they are familiar. Yet, to a citizen of New York City this is not a miracle at all because the laws of natural physics can explain it. Hence, since there exists some natural explanation for the helicopter, regardless of who may or may not understand it, it is not a miracle under this definition.

From this point of view, should there ever be a natural explanation provided for the plagues of Egypt or the miracles of Christ, for example, these events would immediately be removed from the realm of miracle. This is, in part, due to the definition of omnipotence attributed to God as a being that is not subject to the natural laws of time and space. A miracle, then, is generally only associated with those events that are beyond natural law or somehow contradict natural law.

### **Omnipresence - Everywhere Present**

The idea that God is omnipresent follows pretty much the same line of reasoning that we have seen thus far. The great theologians saw no logical contradiction in the idea that God could circumvent the physical laws surrounding space. Hence, in their minds God would clearly be a greater being if he were not bound to one place at a time. As a result, the great theologians felt that God must be able to be in all places at the same time. It is important to note that they were not saying that a part of God was in each place in the universe, for this would clearly not be as good as if all of God were in all places at all times. Thus, these theologians concluded that the whole of God must somehow be in all places at all times.

*According to the law of space no object can exist at two different places at one and the same time. Of course, a part of an object can exist at one place in space while another part of it (if it is a large object) can exist at a different place. The law doesn't deny this. What it denies is that the whole of an object can exist at two different places in space at the same time. Now if this law applied to God either God would be at some place in space at a certain time and not at other places at that same time or he would be everywhere in space at once, but only a part of him in each part of space. Neither of these alternatives was acceptable to the great theologians of the past. On the first alternative, while God might be present in Boston at a certain moment, he couldn't, at that moment, be present in New York. And, on the second alternative, although God could be both in Boston and in New York at the same time, it would be one part of God in New York and a different part in Boston. On the traditional idea of God, not only must God be every place at the same time, the whole of God must be at each distinct place at the same time. The whole of God is in Boston and New York at one and the same time, indeed, at every time. But such a view conflicts with the law of space. And so the idea of God that emerged in western civilization is the idea of a supreme being who is independent of the laws of nature and transcends even the basic law of space. (William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction*, p. 12)*

Notice again in this explanation that it was the great theologians who created this view of God simply because the alternative was not “acceptable” to them. There was no claim to actually having met God or to having God reveal himself to them in some way concerning this matter. Nor did they rely heavily upon the scriptures to come to this conclusion. They simply created God with the attributes that they thought he should have according to the definition they gave him of the greatest conceivable being.

### **Incorporeal - No Body Or Matter**

This attribute is closely tied to the concept of omnipresence as explained in the previous section. Since the possession of a material body or parts of any kind would clearly limit God's ability to be omnipresent, it was determined that God must not possess such things. For if God was comprised of any material parts whatsoever, that would imply that part of God was in one place at one time and another part of God was in another place at that same time. As already discussed, this was unacceptable to the great theologians of western religion because it seemed to limit God.

This same reasoning applies to God being comprised of matter in any way. Even if we conceived of God as a large mass of thinly spread matter that extended throughout the universe, perhaps similar to a gas, this matter would still have parts of it in one area of space while other parts of it existed in other areas of space. It would not be the case that the whole of this matter existed in all places at all times. Hence, again, this was unacceptable to the theologians for it would seem to limit God in some way. Their conclusion was that God must not be comprised of any material content whatsoever. Hence, God cannot be comprised of a body, or parts, or matter of any kind.

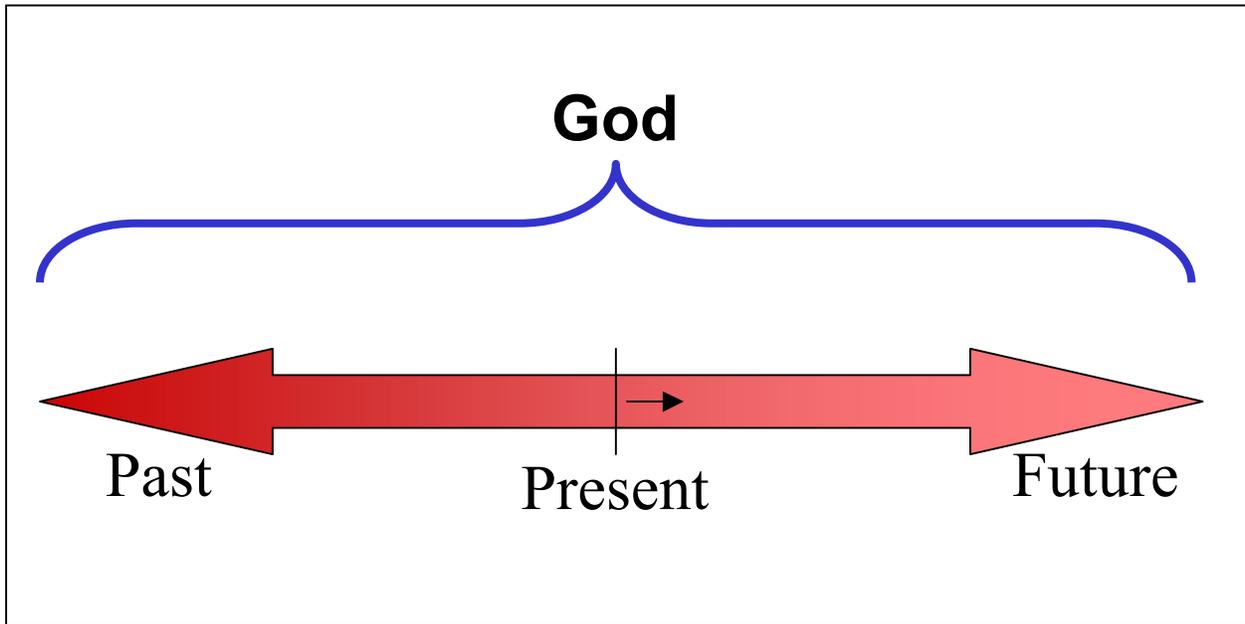
### **Omniscience - All Knowing**

Simply stated, this attribute of God declares that God knows everything in an infinite sense. Under this definition of omniscience, God is not limited by either time or space for his knowledge. In other words, God knows the end of the universe, though it never ends. God knows the highest number, though there is no such thing. He knows all of eternity in both the past and the future, even though neither of these temporal concepts ever end. There is nothing that God does not know and therefore he is not, nor ever has been progressing in knowledge in any way. Everything that God knows now he has always known without any change or variance of any kind. His knowledge has been, is now, and always will be static and unchanging.

This implies that God not only knows such things as when you were born or what you had for dinner last night. It also suggests that God knows what you will wear to work tomorrow, when you will die, and how that death will occur. He knows whether or not you will go to heaven or hell. Likewise He knows not only whether or not a spider crawled across your bedroom floor this morning, he knows where the spider came from, where he went, what the spider did for the rest of its life, which spider it was out of the billions currently on earth, and whether or not other spiders will crawl across your bedroom floor in the future. Indeed, under this definition of God, he would know the sum of all existence through time and space. Anything that is “true” any place or any time would be known by God.

### **Timelessness - All Time Is One “Eternal Now”**

This attribute is closely related to omniscience, as outlined in the previous section. In order to understand the views of the great theologians regarding the timelessness of God, we must first understand what it means to be “in time” as opposed to “outside of time.” According to the law of time there is nothing that can exist in two different times at the same time. For example, if we view time as a straight line with the past going on forever towards the left and the future going on forever to the right, then we might view the present as a thin “knife blade” of existence that is slowly moving from left to right. Each of us, indeed all things in the universe, exist only within this knife blade we call the present. It is true that we existed yesterday and it may be true that we will exist tomorrow, but we can only say that we actually exist in the present. It would be silly, for example, to make the statement, “I exist yesterday,” or “I exist tomorrow.” Neither of these statements can be correct. In fact, given the law of time and the nature of the English language, neither of them would make any sense to us.



The great theologians viewed this existence within time as a limitation to God. If God exists within time, as people do, then it follows that God can only exist in one time at a time. The great theologians felt that it was logically conceivable that God could exist in two different times at once. Hence, following the same line of logic we have outlined with other attributes, if God exists “in time” then we could conceive of a being that is greater than God. Since this contradicts the definition chosen for God as the greatest possible being, God must, therefore, exist outside of time.

*...the great medieval theologians were reluctant to view God's life as split up into temporal parts, and so took the view that God transcends the law of time, as well as the law of space. Even though it is scarcely intelligible, they took the view, as Anselm expresses it, that “the supreme Nature exists in place and time in some such way, that it is not prevented from so existing simultaneously, as a whole, in different places or times....” According to this idea the whole beginningless and endless life of God is simultaneously present to him at each moment of time, and the whole of God is simultaneously present at every place in space. (William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction*, p. 13)*

Hence, under this definition of God, God is at this very moment creating the world, while at the same time he is placing Adam in the Garden of Eden, commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, parting the Red Sea for Moses, watching me write these words, and watching you read them. It is not the case that this is similar to a movie for God or something he can simply see or watch in some way. God is actually doing each one of these things right now. He actually exists in each one of these times all at once.

Given this definition of God as timeless, we could properly say that God experiences time as “one eternal now” and that he exists “outside of time.” In other words, God is simply not bound by the same law of time by which we mortals, and in fact, the rest of the universe, are bound.

Needless to say, this view of God creates many confusing questions that are difficult to answer. For example, was there ever a time when the world did not exist? When viewed from God’s perspective of experiencing all time at once, the earth would have always existed in all of its forms, both in time and space. Simple issues such as whether or not God created the earth become very complex. If God created the earth, when did he do so? In a certain sense, a God who is outside of time must be completely static and experience no change whatsoever. Under this definition, there was never a time when God created anything or brought anything into existence. All things, past, present, and future, have, for God, always existed without any change whatsoever. Likewise, questions such as, “Will I go to heaven,” become somewhat meaningless, for if the answer is “yes,” then we are already with God in heaven. If the answer is “no,” then we are already with Satan in hell. God is right now experiencing us in the future and we are, for all intents and purposes, already in heaven or hell and have been forever. The list of confusing issues surrounding this one concept alone is almost endless.

More problems involved with of this view of God will be discussed in the next section. Suffice it to say for now that the most common view of God, as defined by the great western thinkers, includes the concept of God existing outside of time and therefore experiencing all of time as one eternal now.

### ***Problems With The Judeo-Christian View Of God***

Now that we’ve briefly outlined the traditional view of God as adopted by the three major western religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, we’ll now turn our attention to some of the problems involved with this concept of God.

Although the view of God as outlined above is widely accepted among most of the western world, it is clear that this view creates several fundamental contradictions and tends to be heavily criticized by people who have given the subject much deep thought or consideration. Interestingly enough, although the majority of the concepts surrounding deity came from philosophy to begin with, it is within the realm of philosophy that these concepts of deity receive the largest amount of criticism as well. It is not difficult for a person with even a relatively minimal understanding of logic to come to the conclusion that this definition of God is extremely confusing, if not completely contradictory. This is so much the case that traditional religion’s only defense has often been little more than a plea for blind faith. Religious apologists have often taken the simple stance that we cannot know of such things and therefore must simply believe without solid reason or grounds for our faith. Again, this view of faith has come under extreme attack from the thinking and rational world. Any person who is honestly and sincerely interested in truth should also be interested in logical reasoning, as it is one of mankind’s principle tools for identifying, defining, and communicating truth.

The following arguments show some of the frustrations, apparent contradictions, and confusion brought about by the definition of God explained above. They show why some people, who

otherwise would love to believe in God, often have such difficulty doing so and why the disciplines of philosophy and religion have been viewed as bitter enemies for at least the past two millennia.

### **The Problem Of Evil**

One of the first problems one encounters with the Judeo-Christian definition of God involves the fact that evil exists in the world. In its simplest form, people want to know why a perfectly good God creates and allows evil to exist.

One of the most profound experiences I had during my LDS mission to Holland involved a discussion with a man who had lost his wife and children during World War II. As he related his story to me it became clear that he was once a fairly religious person who could no longer bring himself to believe in God. His story was both riveting and horrible. He told of a time during the war that he was in the local church kneeling in prayer for the protection and welfare of his family. Directly after this supplication he went home to find that during the very time he was praying, soldiers had forcefully entered his home, beat and raped his wife and daughters and killed his son. He asked me directly why God had not protected them, especially since it was during his prayer that this evil had occurred. At the time, I simply had no adequate answer to this question. It was and still is an extremely good question and serves well as the basis for understanding the problem of evil.

The philosophers of religion have discussed this issue for many centuries, but without much success or progress. It is an issue that has direct ties to the definition of God as portrayed by the great thinkers of western religion. The argument has taken many forms but most follow pretty much the same type of simple reasoning:

1. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good.
2. An omnipotent being can do anything.
3. An omniscient being knows everything.
4. A wholly good being prevents all the evil it possibly can.
5. Therefore, either no evils exist or God does not exist.
6. Evils exist.
7. Therefore, God does not exist.

Again, there are variations and further detail that could be added to this basic argument. However, this should be sufficient to make the point at hand.

Going through the argument step by step we find that the first four premises come directly from the Judeo-Christian definition of God as previously outlined. These premises outline how the great theologians, and most of the western world, have chosen to define God.

Premise five shows the direct contradiction between the existence of such a being and the presence of evil of any kind. The two simply provide a logical contradiction similar to a perfectly round square. By definition, if this type of God exists, then there should be no evil.

Premise six simply states that evil clearly exists in the universe. There are few people on earth who will claim that evils do not exist in the world. They do. It is difficult to argue otherwise.

Line seven suggests that the only conclusion one can draw from this set of premises is that God, under this definition, must not exist. This argument clearly shows an apparent contradiction between this definition of God and the fact that evil exists. If God can do anything, then why can't he prevent evil? Or better yet, if God created literally everything in the universe "from nothing" then why did he create evil in the first place? Why didn't He simply create everything perfect to begin with? Using this definition of God, not only didn't God prevent evil from coming into existence, which is a problem in and of itself, but it also follows from this line of reasoning that God himself is actually the creator of all the evil that exists in the universe.

I dare say that although many people have tried to sweep this argument under the carpet, so to speak, not a single person in history has been able to successfully solve this dilemma. Some have tried to claim, for example, that there really are no evils, but only lesser goods. Yet, the argument remains the same concerning lesser goods as it does for evils. Why would God create or allow lesser goods? Others have claimed that the evils exist for our own good and learning. However, this implies that God could not create us with an innate knowledge of all things and a perfect disposition to do good. Hence, God would not be completely omnipotent in such a scenario. The list of poor apologetics goes on. Suffice it to say that this argument provides a very difficult situation for the religions that espouse this concept of God.

It should be clear that so long as we hold to this view of God, the problem of evil will likely continue to plague us and remain the foundation of many people's skepticism about the existence of any God at all. It is a very solid argument that hits home to many people in very real ways.

### **Divine Foreknowledge And Human Free Will**

Another of the concerns raised by this view of God deals with the apparent contradiction between God's proposed foreknowledge and mankind's free will to make our own decisions. Logically speaking, this argument simply states that if God knows all of my choices in the future, then I am not making those choices freely. Something is causing me to make those choices. On the other hand, if I am free to make my future choices, God simply cannot know what those choices will be, otherwise they are not free choices. Divine foreknowledge and human free will are logically incompatible. If one exists, the other does not.

The following story helps to illustrate the problem of divine foreknowledge and human free will and bring it home to a possible real life scenario. As you read the story try to place yourself in this scenario.

#### *The Story Of Osmo*

*Let us suppose that God has revealed a particular set of facts to a chosen scribe who, believing (correctly) that they came from God, wrote them all down. The facts in question then turned out to be all of the more or less significant episodes in the life of*

*some perfectly ordinary man named Osmo. Osmo was entirely unknown to the scribe, and in fact to just about everyone, but there was no doubt concerning whom all these facts were about, for the very first thing received by the scribe from God, was: "He of whom I speak is called Osmo." When the revelations reached a fairly voluminous bulk and appeared to be completed, the scribe arranged them in chronological order and assembled them into a book. He first gave it the title "The Life of Osmo, as Given by God," but thinking that people would take this to be some sort of joke, he dropped the reference to God.*

*The book was published but attracted no attention whatsoever, because it appeared to be nothing more than the record of the dull life of a very plain man named Osmo. The scribe wondered, in fact, why God had chosen to convey such a mass of seemingly pointless trivia.*

*The book eventually found its way into various libraries, where it gathered dust until one day a high school teacher in Indiana, who rejoiced under the name of Osmo, saw a copy on the shelf. The title caught his eye. Curiously picking it up and blowing off the dust, he was thunderstruck by the first sentence: "Osmo is born in Mercy Hospital in Auburn, Indiana, on June 6, 1942, of Finnish parentage, and after nearly losing his life from pneumonia at the age of five, he is enrolled in St. James school there." Osmo turned pale. The book nearly fell from his hands. He thumbed back in excitement to discover who had written it. Nothing was given of its authorship nor, for that matter, of its publisher. His questions of the librarian produced no further information, he being as ignorant as Osmo of how the book came to be there.*

*So Osmo, with the book pressed tightly under his arm, dashed across the street for some coffee, thinking to compose himself and then examine this book with care. Meanwhile he glanced at a few more of its opening remarks, at the things said there about the difficulties with his younger sister, how he was slow in learning to read, of the summer at Mackinac Island, and so on. His emotions now somewhat quieted, Osmo began a close reading. He noticed that everything was expressed in the present tense, the way newspaper headlines are written. For example, the text read, "Osmo is born in Mercy Hospital" instead of saying he was born there, and it recorded that he quarrels with his sister, is a slow student, is fitted with dental braces at age eight, and so on, all in the journalistic present tense. But the text itself made quite clear approximately when all these various things happened, for everything was in chronological order, and in any case each year of its subject's life constituted a separate chapter and was so titled - "Osmo's seventh Year," "Osmo's Eighth Year," and so on through the book.*

*Osmo became absolutely engrossed, to the extent that he forgot his original astonishment, bordering on panic, and for a while even lost his curiosity concerning authorship. He sat drinking coffee and reliving his childhood, much of which he had all but forgotten until memories were revived by the book now before him. He had almost forgotten about the kitten, for example, and had entirely forgotten its name, until he read, in the chapter called "Osmo's Seventh Year," this observation: "Sobbing, Osmo takes Fluffy, now quite dead, to the garden, and buries her next to the rose bush." Ah yes, and*

*then there was Louise, who sat next to him in eighth grade - it was all right there. And how he got caught smoking one day. And how he felt when his father died. On and on. Osmo became so absorbed that he quite forgot the business of the day, until it occurred to him to turn to chapter 26, to see what might be said there, he having just recently turned 26. He had no sooner done so than his panic returned, for lo! What the book said was true! That it rains on his birthday for example, that his wife fails to give him the binoculars he had hinted he would like, that he receives a raise in salary shortly thereafter, and so on. Now how in the world, Osmo pondered, could anyone know that apparently before it happened? For these were quite recent events, and the book had dust on it. Quickly moving on, Osmo came to this: "Sitting and reading in the coffee shop across from the library, Osmo, perspiring copiously, entirely forgets, until it is too late, that he is supposed to collect his wife at the hairdresser's at four." Oh my gosh! He had forgotten all about that. Yanking out his watch, Osmo discovered that it was nearly five o'clock - too late. She would be on her way home by now, and in a very sour mood.*

*Osmo's anguish at this discovery was nothing, though, compared with what the rest of the day held for him. He poured more coffee, and now it occurred to him to check the number of chapters in this amazing book: only 29! But surely, he thought, that doesn't mean anything. How anyone could have gotten all this stuff down so far was puzzling enough, to be sure, but no one on God's earth could possibly know in advance how long this or that person is going to live. (Only God could know that sort of thing, Osmo reflected.) So he read along; though not without considerable uneasiness and even depression, for the remaining three chapters were on the whole discouraging. He thought he had gotten that ulcer under control, for example. And he didn't see any reason to suppose that his job was going to turn out that badly, or that he was really going to break a leg skiing; after all, he could just give up skiing. But then the book ended on a terribly dismal note. It said, "And Osmo, having taken Northwest flight 569 from O'Hare, perishes when the aircraft crashes on the runway at Fort Wayne, with considerable loss of life, a tragedy the more calamitous by the fact that Osmo had neglected to renew his life insurance before the expiration of the grace period." And that was all. That was the end of the book.*

*So that's why it only had 29 chapters. Some idiot thought he was going to get killed in a plane crash. But, Osmo thought, he just wouldn't get on that plane. And this would also remind him to keep his life insurance in force.*

*(About three years later our hero, having boarded a flight for St. Paul, went berserk when the pilot announced they were going to land at Fort Wayne instead. According to one of the flight attendants, he tried to hijack the aircraft and divert it to another airfield. The Civil Aeronautics Board cited the resulting disruption as contributing to the crash that followed as the plane tried to land.)<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This story was taken from the book, *Metaphysics, Third Edition* by Richard Taylor, pp. 54-56.

As with most philosophical arguments, there are many ways to outline the problem of divine foreknowledge and human free will. However, most will follow some sort of reasoning similar to the following:

1. God knows everything that we will do in life long before it ever happens.
2. If God knows everything we will do before we do it, then we have no alternative but to do what God knows we will do.
3. If we have no alternatives, then there is no human free will or choice.
4. Therefore, if God knows everything in the future, there is no human free will.

There are a few mistakes that most people make when analyzing this argument for the first time. The first mistake deals with our understanding of the relationship between knowledge and truth. The definition of “knowledge,” as it is most commonly used to define God, implies truth. In other words, there can be nothing that is known that is false. If there is any chance at all that something God claims to know won’t happen, then we can safely say that God doesn’t know that thing, he only believes it. Hence, divine foreknowledge includes the idea that God not only knows everything that will happen in the future, but that he has always known what will happen and, because he exists outside of time, that he is experiencing the whole of our future at this very moment. Hence, for God, our future is already his present. Therefore, there can be no diverting from what God knows is going to happen. It is only the future to us. It is actually happening right now to God. Simply stated, absolute foreknowledge implies absolute inevitability.

The second mistake that many people make concerning this apparent contradiction deals with the difference between foreknowledge and causation. For example, a common response to this argument is that just because God knows something will happen doesn’t mean he will cause it to happen. This response proposes that we are still free to choose for ourselves, God simply knows what those choices will be. This, however, is irrelevant to the argument. It doesn’t matter whether or not God causes something to happen. All that is required to make this argument valid is for God to know that something, anything, will cause the event to happen. What often goes unnoticed is that the argument never mentions the cause of the event, nor does it depend upon the cause for its conclusion. The cause of the event is not only undetermined, but as far as this argument is concerned, it is unimportant. The simple fact remains that if God knows that the event will happen, something will definitely cause it to happen. Hence, there is no human free will to choose anything else.

It should be noted that any conclusion that suggests a lack of human free will is also problematic to western religions in general. If there is no human free will, for example, then any attempts to do good are sheer folly, for we are not free to choose good or evil. In addition, any judgments we place on people, whether in this life or the next, become all but meaningless. Without free will a person cannot repent. Salvation is arbitrary or simply based on a series of causes that are completely out of our control. We will go to heaven or hell regardless of our supposed efforts or desires. Why would anyone try to be a better person or obey God’s commandments if we have no control or influence on the outcome whatsoever? Indeed, one of the great premises of western religion - that of rewards and punishments based on personal actions, desires, and/or beliefs - becomes a moot and meaningless point.

Since most believers in western theology want to be both free and to believe in a God who is perfectly omniscient, this contradiction provides a very uncomfortable situation for them. Some of the greatest philosophers in history have tried to overcome this apparent contradiction, but with little or no success. As far as man's thinking has taken us, the logic of this argument is very sound. It is possible that someone will come along some day and find a way around the apparent contradiction between divine foreknowledge and human free will. Until that happens, however, we can do little more than scratch our heads and continue to express a form of blind faith that somehow everything will turn out right in the end.

### **The Meaninglessness of God**

One of the major arguments for the existence of God is called the Ontological argument. It was originally advanced by Saint Anselm and, like most other arguments surrounding the Judeo-Christian view of God, it is dependant on the definition given to God as one of its major premises. One way to express the argument is as follows:

1. By definition, God is that than which none greater can be conceived or the greatest possible being.
2. There are things that exist only in our understanding and there are things that exist both in our understanding as well as in reality.
3. The idea of the theistic or Judeo-Christian God exists in our understanding.
4. It is possible that God exists in reality as well as in our understanding.
5. God would be greater if he existed in reality and not just in our understanding.
6. Therefore, according to the definition of God as the greatest possible being, God must exist in reality as well as our understanding.

As silly as this argument may sound, it has become one of the greatest arguments for the existence of the Judeo-Christian God. Saint Anselm uses logic to show that his definition of God, because of the very definition itself, simply must exist. Without going into a lengthy and detailed explanation of the argument, our purpose here is simply to question premise five in the argument above. Would it be greater or better if this type of God actually existed in reality as opposed to only existing in our understanding? If so, how would it be greater or better?

Consider for a moment a God who is everywhere but nowhere, a God that doesn't exist in space or time, a God who is static and absolutely unchangeable, unaffected by the universe around him, who doesn't answer prayers or react to my circumstances in any way, and so forth. How is the existence of this God greater than if he didn't exist at all? For all intents and purposes, this God becomes absolutely meaningless to us.

If the God of Judeo-Christian tradition exists, then all of life throughout the universe is already planned. In fact, since God is outside of time, everything that ever has happened, is now happening, or ever will happen is already predetermined and has been forever. If all actions are "one eternal now" to God, then reality is unchanging and, in fact, unchangeable. There is no real conversion or repentance, for people are not free to change their hearts or freely seek a spiritual life. There is no hope for a better life because life will be just as it appears before God at this very moment. Hitler had no choice but to torture and kill millions of Jews. Jack the Ripper had

no choice but to kill innocent people. There is not a single soul on earth who can change the world to be any better or worse of a place than the one that is already being experienced by God, past, present, and future, at this very moment. If this God exists, life itself becomes meaningless. And since God will not react to my prayers or respond in any way to anything anyone does or is or will become, God himself, under this definition, becomes meaningless.

Why would it be better or greater if this God of the philosophers exists in reality? Because of him, all the evil in the universe exists. Some might say that God only created the people or circumstances that brought about evil, but did not create the evil itself. This is tantamount to saying that if I held a gun to the face of another person and pulled the trigger, I could blame the entire incident on the gun instead of myself. Just as I know what a gun will do when I point it at someone and pull the trigger, this man-made God of Judeo-Christianity knew that when he created Hitler, millions of Jews would die. He knew that when he created the earth, millions of people would suffer horribly from all kinds of natural causes. All wars exist because of this God, as well as famines, pestilence, hunger, sorrow, and all other instances of human and animal suffering. Why would it be better for this being to exist in reality as opposed to only in my mind?

It has been said,

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)*

Can we conceive of any possible way to know a being that doesn't exist in time or space and has no body, parts, or passions of any kind? Is there any hope of understanding or "knowing" such a mass of confusion? Even if it were possible, why would I want to know Him? How will that change my predetermined life in any way? To say that God loves us, for example, loses all meaning. The only type of love we understand as humans is that which requires reaction and feeling. According to the great theologians, this God of western religion has none of those attributes and as such he either doesn't love us or he loves us in a way that is completely foreign and unknown to us. Either way, to say that this God loves us becomes a meaningless statement.

It has also been said,

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48)*

What meaning does this verse of scripture have when my "Father" is defined in this manner? There is no choice on my part of either becoming or not becoming perfect, or anything else for that matter. If I am ever to become perfect it is not up to me. And what does it mean to become perfect like God in the first place? Does it mean that I will someday become a completely static being who ceases to exist in time and space and has no body, parts, or passions? Why would I want to become like this God? It seems that to become a being like this would be the closest thing to non-existence that we can imagine. Why would anyone desire such a thing? For all intents and purposes these scriptures, indeed all scriptures, lose their meaning, purpose, and significance if this God of western theology exists.

This list showing the meaninglessness of the existence of the Judeo-Christian God could go on and on. It is difficult to find a good reason why the existence of this God would have any meaning to us at all. It is likewise difficult to show how the gospel or religion of any kind has any meaning within the definition of this God.

In addition, if this God of western theology exists, it is the nature of his very existence that removes any meaning in our lives that we think we might have. It is God's fault that life is meaningless. Indeed, it would be better that this God does not exist than that he does exist. Our lives become little more or less than the meaningless acting out of a pointless play before a non-caring, non-feeling, non-reacting God who is nothing and does nothing, but who simply exists for the mere sake of existence itself.

Why would we possibly care about the existence of such a being? How could we possibly believe that the existence of such a being has any bearing on our lives whatsoever, other than mere existence itself? And why would this being be greater if He existed in reality as opposed to simply remaining as a nightmare in our understanding? Judging by all that we value as human beings, it would be worse...much worse, if this God existed in reality as opposed to only in our minds. It is no wonder that many rational, thinking people choose to hold this view of God as merely a nightmare that must be endured as opposed to a loving, caring, real being that brings hope and joy.

## Summary

Perhaps the best way to summarize the difficulties encountered when dealing with this definition of God is to relate a hypothetical discussion based on an email message sent to me by a friend some time ago. Although hypothetical, the points made are very real and have likely occurred in one form or another in classrooms and discussions around the world. It illustrates the great difficulty we have in defending a belief in the existence of this type of God. The setting is a philosophy class at a university somewhere in the United States.

*"Let me explain the problem science has with Jesus Christ." The atheist professor of philosophy pauses before his class and then asks one of his new students to stand.*

*"You're a Christian, aren't you, son?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"So you believe in God?"*

*"Absolutely."*

*"Is God good?"*

*"Sure! God's good."*

*"Is God all-powerful? Can God do anything?"*

*"Yes."*

*The professor grins knowingly. He considers for a moment.*

*"Here's one for you. Let's say there's a sick person over here, and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help them? Would you try?"*

*"Yes sir, I would."*

*"You would help a sick and maimed person if you could...in fact most of us would if we could... God doesn't."*

*No answer.*

*"He doesn't, does he? My brother was a Christian who died of cancer even though he prayed to Jesus to heal him. How is this Jesus good? Hmmm? Can you answer that one?"*

*No answer.*

*The elderly man is sympathetic. "No, you can't, can you?" He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax. In philosophy, you have to go easy with the new ones.*

*"Let's start again, young fella. Is God good?"*

*"Er... Yes."*

*"Is Satan good?"*

*"No."*

*"Where does Satan come from?"*

*The student falters. "From...God..."*

*"That's right. God made Satan, didn't he?" The elderly man runs his bony fingers through his thinning hair and turns to the smirking, student audience.*

*"I think we're going to have a lot of fun this semester, ladies and gentlemen." He turns back to the Christian.*

*"Tell me, son. Is there evil in this world?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"Evil's everywhere, isn't it? Did God make everything?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Who created evil?"*

*No answer.*

*"Is there sickness in this world? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All the terrible things - do they exist in this world?"*

*The student squirms on his feet. "Yes."*

*"Who created them?"*

*No answer.*

*The professor suddenly shouts at his student. "WHO CREATED THEM? TELL ME, PLEASE!"*

*Still no response from the young student.*

*The professor closes in for the kill and climbs into the Christian's face. In a still small voice: "God created all evil, didn't He, son?"*

*No answer. The student tries to hold the steady, experienced gaze and fails.*

*Suddenly the lecturer breaks away to pace the front of the classroom like an aging panther. The class is mesmerized.*

*"Tell me," he continues, "How is it that this God is good if He created all evil throughout all time?" The professor swishes his arms around to encompass the wickedness of the world. "All the hatred, the brutality, all the pain, all the torture, all the death and ugliness and all the suffering created by this good God is all over the world, isn't it, young man?"*

*No answer.*

*“Don’t you see it all over the place? Huh?” Pause. “Don’t you?” The professor leans into the student’s face again and whispers, “Is God good?”*

*No answer.*

*Walking back to the front of the class, the professor moves on. “Tell me young man, can you describe this God of yours?”*

*“I’m not sure what you mean, sir?”*

*“Is this God everywhere? Does God fill the immensity of space?”*

*“Yes, I believe He does.”*

*“All of Him, all at the same time?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“So, you believe all of God fills the immensity of space and not just part of Him?”*

*“All of Him, sir.”*

*“So all of God is everywhere present, all at the same time?”*

*“Yes, sir.”*

*“Do you believe that God dwells in your heart?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“Which part of Him dwells in your heart?”*

*Taking a deep sigh the student answers, “All of Him, sir.”*

*“Wait a minute now, son. You just told me that all of God fills the whole universe while at the same time all of God dwells in your heart. Is that correct?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“Does that make sense to you, son? Do you understand it?”*

*“Not really, sir.”*

*“You don’t? Interesting. Do you think anyone does understand it? Do you know anyone who can explain it to me?”*

*No answer.*

*The professor looks down at his shoe for a moment and continues, “So tell me, do you believe God is completely omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and perfectly good?”*

*“Yes.”*

*The professor walks to within a few feet of the Christian and raises his voice noticeably.*

*“Would I be correct in describing God as so large He can fill the universe and yet so small He can dwell in your heart, both at the same time? Does God know the highest number, though it doesn’t exist? Does He comprehend the entire universe, though it never ends? Does God know all of my choices in the future, therefore making it impossible for me to choose anything other than what he knows I will choose? Does He prevent all the evil he can while creating all the evil that exists? Is this the God in which you believe, son?”*

*There is dead silence throughout the class as the professor glares at the student. “Please feel free to answer any one of these questions, son.”*

*“I’m not sure, sir. I guess I don’t know.”*

*The professor calmly turns and walks back to the front of the room. “Admitting ignorance on a subject is a good thing. It allows room to learn. Perhaps an easier question: Can you tell me what kind of God you worship?”*

*“I’m not sure I follow you, sir.”*

*“Can you tell me what God looks like?”*

*“I’m not sure. I guess He doesn’t look like anything, sir.”*

*“Is God made of matter?”*

*“No, sir.”*

*“Does He have any parts or components or pieces of any kind?”*

*“I guess not.”*

*“Does He have any form or mass of any kind?”*

*“No, sir.”*

*“Is He made of anything at all?”*

*“No.”*

*“So, tell me, son...can you think of anything else in the universe, other than space itself, that has no mass, no body, no components, no pieces, and is not made of anything at all?”*

*The student pauses for a moment. “No, sir. Just empty space.”*

*“And tell me, can you describe empty space for me?”*

*Hesitantly the Christian mutters, “Well, it’s a place where nothing exists, sir.”*

*“So, empty space, as you call it, is best described by saying it is the absence of something or, rather, it is NOTHING. Is that right?”*

*The student looks up at the ceiling in frustration and mutters, “I suppose so.”*

*“You SUPPOSE so? Tell me please, of all the things in the universe, is this God of yours best described as being most like empty space or in other words, nothing? Do you then believe and worship NOTHING? Is that what you’re telling me, son.”*

*“No, sir. I believe I worship something.”*

*“What is it you worship, son? Can you tell me anything about this being that makes any sense to me in any way – anything that I can naturally understand or use to come to comprehend or appreciate this God of yours?”*

*No answer.*

*“In reality, you have no idea what it is that you believe or worship, do you? The best you can do is say that you worship a God that cannot be explained or described, does not exist in time or space, has no body, parts, or passions, and that the best comparison we can make to this God is that he is most like empty space. Isn’t this true, son? Isn’t this an accurate description of the God in which you believe?”*

*The student tries his best to hold back the emotion on his face, “I guess so, sir.”*

*One last round of questions and I’ll let you alone. “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, son?”*

*The student’s voice betrays him and cracks. “Yes, professor. I do.”*

*The old man shakes his head sadly. “Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen your Jesus?”*

*“No, sir. I’ve never seen Him.”*

*“Then tell us if you’ve ever heard your Jesus?”*

*“No, sir. I have not.”*

*“Have you ever felt your Jesus, tasted your Jesus or smelt your Jesus... In fact, do you have any sensory perception of your Jesus whatsoever?”*

*No answer.*

*“Answer me, please.”*

*“No, sir, I’m afraid I haven’t.”*

*“You’re AFRAID... you haven’t?”*

*“No, sir.”*

*“Yet you still believe in him?”*

*“...yes...”*

*“That takes FAITH!” The professor smiles sagely at the underling. “According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn’t exist. What do you say to that, son? Where is your God now?”*

*The student doesn’t answer.*

*“Tell me, son, and tell me truthfully, do any of your beliefs about God make any sense to you at all or is it all just as much a mass of confusion to you as it is to me?”*

*Kicking the floor slightly, the student refuses to answer.*

*“Sit down, please.”*

*The Christian sits...Defeated.*

*Smugly the professor challenges the rest of the class, “Does anyone else want to try to defend Christianity this morning?”*

*The class is deathly quiet.*

*“I thought not. As you can see, philosophy is the search for truth and this can be a very harsh business indeed. It cares not for your feelings, only about truth. It is very harsh, indeed.”*

Although a fictional story, it is clear from this narrative why many people struggle greatly with the concept of God as proposed by the philosophers of Judeo-Christian tradition. This concept of God is at best a mass of confusion, at worst, nothing more than a man-made fable containing little or no reality concerning the true God who hears and answers our prayers. This concept of God is only worthwhile in that it seems to appeal to the ignorant masses who want to believe in some being who is completely different than themselves. For some reason, many people actually seem to thrive in this environment of confusion and contradiction. Some seem to feel that God must be incomprehensible and that our faith in him must be blind and without explanation. For some, this confusion seems to be part of the very beauty of it all.

Interestingly enough, most people honestly feel that the only decision available to them is either to continue to blindly believe in this God of western philosophy or to abandon any belief in God whatsoever. In other words, most people are so caught up in this man-made definition of God that they are absolutely unwilling to consider alternative views of God in order to overcome these apparent contradictions and the mass of confusion they’ve created. They would prefer to rely solely on blind faith concerning the God of western theology rather than entertain the idea that God may actually be a very different type of being than the great theologians have advanced. We have to remember who told us that God was this way in the first place. Where did this concept of God originate? Was it the Bible? The Torah? The Koran? Or was this view of God mostly defined by various philosophers and theologians who simply promoted what they felt God should be like, but who never claimed to obtain this information directly from God himself? Clearly the greatest amount of evidence points towards this definition of God coming from the great western theologians and not from any scriptural reference or professed revelations from God himself. At the very least this should make us question this view of God. At most, we should give it little or no credibility at all.

# The God Of Mormonism

Now that we have explained the basics of western theology as they pertain to the definition and attributes of God, let's focus our attention on the LDS view of God. In contrast to the God created by the great philosophers of western theology, Mormonism holds to a view of God that, in many ways, breaks this tradition and that the attributes of God are very different both in content and in origin. Serving both as a source of comfort to some and a shock or astonishment to others, the LDS view of God has broken the mold of western religious tradition in significant ways.

The following pages discuss how and why Mormonism is different from all other western religions. We'll also show how the LDS view of God is much less confusing and how it overcomes most of the major criticisms of the Judeo-Christian view of God. By the end of this process we should note that whatever we may think of Joseph Smith, he must have been at least a brilliant philosopher, in the same class as most or all of the great western theologians, or at most that he was a true prophet who perhaps didn't even understand the significance of some of the things he was told by God during his lifetime. Either way, the following teachings introduced by Joseph Smith can only be viewed as sheer brilliance and worthy of further investigation by anyone with sincere desires to know and understand God.

## ***The Attributes Of God***

Unlike the God of western philosophy that we have just described, the LDS view of God did not come about due to a philosophically pleasing definition of God that led to further definitions of each individual attribute. Rather, the definition of God as proclaimed and taught within LDS theology, along with all of the attributes that we will discuss, came about simply as a result of Joseph Smith boldly declaring that God and his servants told him what God is like. There is no evidence that Joseph Smith was a philosopher himself or that he was systematically trying to overcome the great philosophical problems surrounding the Judeo-Christian view of God. Those who followed the prophet were largely responsible for showing many of the relationships between Joseph Smith's view of God and that created by the great western theologians. For the most part, Joseph Smith himself simply told the world what he had been told. He believed it not because of some view of what he thought God should be. He believed it because that is what God had told him. What an amazing concept! What an absolutely tremendous argument in favor of the simple teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith over those of traditional western theology. The prophet's argument for defining and describing the true God was fairly simple:

*I want to ask this congregation, every man, woman and child, to answer the question in their own heart, what kind of a being God is? Ask yourselves; turn your thought into your hearts, and say if any of you have seen, heard, or communed with him. This is a question that may occupy your attention for a long time. I again repeat the question—What kind of a being is God? Does any man or woman know? Have any of you seen him, heard him, or communed with him? Here is the question that will, peradventure, from this time henceforth occupy your attention. The Scriptures inform us that “This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”*  
*(Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.343)*

This question might well be asked of the great western theologians. Did any of them ever see, hear, or commune directly with God when they set forth to define and describe him? It is important that these basic differences between the great western theologians and Joseph Smith are clearly understood. The theologians were trying to prove that their man-made definition of God was, in reality, true and that this type of God could actually exist. They were perhaps seeking God as best they could without ever actually seeing or talking to him. On the other hand, Joseph Smith was perhaps not so eloquent or “logical” about his approach. However, he simply reported what he saw and heard. Joseph Smith’s knowledge of God came directly from God. What better confirmation of God’s attributes could we hope to have than that of personal experience?

*And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all which we give of him: That he lives!*

*For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father--*

*That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. (D&C 76:22-24)*

This simple testimony from the Prophet Joseph Smith is the basis for and origin of the LDS view of God. Unlike the great western religions, Mormonism claims that its views are true simply because God said so. Joseph Smith held claim to both types of “knowing” God that we discussed at the beginning of this work. He did not only make an attempt to describe God’s attributes, he also claimed to know God on a much more personal basis, even as a friend.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly enough, the LDS view of God, as taught by the prophet Joseph Smith, also makes a great deal of sense and overcomes some of the greatest challenges and attacks encountered by the great theologians. It is practical theology that provides a God worthy of our worship and adoration, as opposed to a mythical, man-made God that none of us can even understand, let alone ever hope to know.

It is unfortunate that even within Mormonism there are often misunderstandings and disputations concerning some of these teachings. It should be noted that this, however, separates Mormonism little from other religions where such debates have raged for centuries. The fact that many Latter-day Saints may not be fully aware of these teachings or even that some of the leaders of the LDS church have been, on occasion, more or less out of harmony with these teachings provides little or no solid criticism concerning the teachings themselves, or even the LDS church for that matter. Learning and understanding is always a process, not an event. And whenever people are involved we should expect that speculation will arise and misunderstandings will flourish to some extent.

The following major attributes of God are the same as those listed for the Judeo-Christian view of God. However, as we will see, LDS theology views most of these attributes very differently

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<sup>2</sup> D&C 93:45

than most of western society. It is not so much that LDS theology rejects each of these attributes. It is more that LDS theology defines each attribute differently than traditional theology. To a large extent, these views have played a major role in the persecutions that have been heaped upon the people of Mormondom since its inception. Even today, these teachings are belittled and commonly used as fodder for the anti-Mormon campaigns. Yet, as we will see, these teachings are far superior in both origin and logic to those professed by the major western religions as outlined above.

### **Incorporeal - No Body Or Matter**

One of the major differences between the LDS view of God and that of Judeo-Christian tradition deals with the LDS belief that God has a tangible, physical body that exists in both time and space, and hence, obeys the natural, physical laws of both time and space. This has great bearing on many of the other attributes of deity we have discussed.

Again, the reason for this belief stems from Joseph Smith's personal visitations by God and Christ. There is little evidence that Joseph Smith concocted this view of God simply to derail the great philosophers. Especially in his early years, he seemed to be simply trying to tell the world about his experiences with God. Starting with his first vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ, the prophet learned many things about God that, thanks to our great western theologians, were all but unheard of among modern religions. One of the first things the prophet learned from this experience was that God the Father and Jesus Christ had physical bodies that looked and acted much like our own. This was later clearly explained in the Doctrine and Covenants within the following passages:

*When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves.*

*And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.*

*John 14:23--The appearing of the Father and the Son, in that verse, is a personal appearance; and the idea that the Father and the Son dwell in a man's heart is an old sectarian notion, and is false. (D&C 130:1-3)*

*The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us. (D&C 130:22)*

Of these principles the prophet Joseph Smith once taught,

*I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth, for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and to tell you the designs of God in relation to the human race, and why He interferes with the affairs of man.*

*God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.345)*

As we will see, this turned the view of God held by the great theologians on its head. It changed a great many things concerning our view of the kind of being God really is and how many of these attributes actually apply to God. It is the basis for many LDS beliefs about God. As we proceed through the other attributes, we will see how this discovery by Joseph Smith affects a great many of the attributes traditionally associated with God.

### **Omnipresence - Everywhere Present**

This attribute is closely tied to the concept of incorporeality. Clearly the possession of a physical body or parts of any kind would limit God's ability to be omnipresent in the traditional sense, as advanced by the great theologians. As previously explained, they believed that the immediate presence of God must somehow be present everywhere at once. Therefore, according to these theologians, it was concluded that God must not possess a physical or material body of any kind.

LDS theology takes somewhat of an opposite approach to this issue. Rather than saying that God must be completely omnipresent, therefore he cannot have a physical body, Mormonism boldly teaches that since God told us he has a physical body, he must, therefore, not be able to be completely omnipresent in the traditional sense. The God of LDS theology obeys the law of space and, hence, can only be physically present in one place at one time.

That said, LDS theology does not completely reject the notion of God's omnipresence. It does, however, define what that means in very different terms when compared with the ideas of the great religious philosophers. As Elder Orson Pratt explained,

*God... is omnipresent. Not personally; this would be impossible, for a person can only be in one place at the same instant, whether he be an immortal or a mortal personage; whether he be high, exalted, and filled with all power, wisdom, glory, and greatness, or poor, ignorant, and humble. So far as the materials are concerned, a personage can only occupy one place at the same moment. That is a self-evident truth, one that cannot be controverted. When we speak, therefore, of God being omnipresent we do not mean that His person is omnipresent, we mean that His wisdom, power, glory, greatness, goodness, and all the characteristics of His eternal attributes are manifested and spread abroad throughout all the creations that He has made. He is there by His influence--by His power and wisdom--by His outstretched arm; He, by His authority, occupies the immensity of space. But when we come to His glorious personage, that has a dwelling place--a particular location; but where this location is, is not revealed. Suffice it to say that God is not confined in His personal character to one location. He goes and comes;*

*He visits the various departments of His dominions, gives them counsel and instruction, and presides over them according to His own will and pleasure. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.14, Pg. 233-234)*

Expressing similar sentiments, Elder Charles W. Penrose had this to say about the omnipresence of God:

*While our Father, then, is a person, an individual, it may be asked: "How can He be here, there and everywhere at the same time?" Well, He is not, in His personality; but He can be omnipresent in a certain sense. There is a spirit, an influence, that proceeds from God, that fills the immensity of space, the Holy Spirit, the Light of Truth. As the Sun itself, a planet or heavenly body, is not present in any other place except that which it actually occupies, so the individual Father occupies a certain locality; and as the light that proceeds from the sun spreads abroad upon all the face of the earth and lights up other planets as well as this earth, penetrating to the circumference of an extended circle in the midst of God's great universe, so the light of God, the Spirit of God, proceeding forth from the presence of God, fills the immensity of space. (Journal of Discourses, 26:22-23)*

And finally, Elder B. H. Roberts, who arguably may be the greatest "philosopher" of Mormonism, gives his interpretation of God's omnipresence.

*So the attribute "Omnipresence" - the Everywhere Present attribute. This must be so far limited as to be ascribed to God's Spirit, or Influence, or Power: but not of God as a Person or Individual: for in these latter respects even God is limited by the law that one body cannot occupy two places at one and the same time. But radiating from his presence, as beams of light and warmth radiate from our sun, is God's Spirit, penetrating and permeating space, making space and all worlds in space vibrate with his life and thought and presence: holding all forces—dynamic and static—under control, making them to subserve his will and purposes. (The Seventy's Course in Theology, Fourth Year, p.70-71)*

Thus we see that the God of Mormonism is not omnipresent in the sense that the whole of his personal being is everywhere at all times. This is rational doctrine. It is doctrine that we can understand and that makes sense to us. It was not created on the assumption of various philosophers that God must be a certain kind of being. It is simply the result of information given directly to Joseph Smith by God. It is the result of Joseph Smith physically seeing God in one particular location at a time.

### **Omnipotence - All Powerful**

Unlike the view of western religious philosophy, which claims that the only limitation to God's power involves logical contradictions, LDS theology holds to the idea that God must also obey natural or physical laws, such as the laws of time and space. Mormonism proclaims that there are natural laws that are outside of God's complete control. These natural laws are co-eternal with God and cannot be circumvented by any power in the universe. Within LDS theology, to be

omnipotent simply implies the ability to bring about any state of affairs consistent with the nature of other eternal realities. Again, Elder B. H. Roberts helps us to understand this principle.

*What then, is meant by the ascription of the attribute omnipotence to God? Simply that all that may or can be done by power conditioned by other eternal existences - duration, space, matter, truth, justice, reign of law, God can do. But even He may not act out of harmony with the other eternal existences which condition or limit even Him. (The Truth, The Way, The Life, p.418)*

*The attribute "Omnipotence" must needs be thought upon also as somewhat limited. Even God, notwithstanding the ascription to him of all-powerfulness in such scripture phrases as "With God all things are possible," "Nothing shall be impossible with God" - notwithstanding all this, I say, not even God may have two mountain ranges without a valley between. Not even God may place himself beyond the boundary of space: nor on the outside of duration. Nor is it conceivable to human thought that he can create space, or annihilate matter. These are things that limit even God's Omnipotence. What then, is meant by the ascription of the attribute Omnipotence to God? Simply that all that may or can be done by power conditioned by other eternal existences—duration, space, matter, truth, justice—God can do. But even he may not act out of harmony with the other eternal existences which condition or limit even him. (The Seventy's Course in Theology, Fourth Year, p.70)*

This concept that God is not only limited by the laws of logic, but also by the laws of time and space, opens up a whole new variety of concepts regarding God's interaction with us, his children. Some of these ramifications will be discussed in later sections.

### What Is A Miracle?

One of the effects of this view of omnipotence is that it changes the way in which miracles are viewed. As already mentioned, traditional theology tends to define a miracle as something that contradicts natural law. Because LDS theology rejects the possibility of opposing natural law, even for God, miracles must obey these laws as well. Hence, a miracle within LDS theology includes the concept that there is some natural law that will eventually explain the miracles we experience. Elder James E. Talmage helps us to understand the LDS view of miracles:

*Miracles are commonly regarded as occurrences in opposition to the laws of nature. Such a conception is plainly erroneous, for the laws of nature are inviolable. However, as human understanding of these laws is at best but imperfect, events strictly in accordance with natural law may appear contrary thereto. The entire constitution of nature is founded on system and order; the laws of nature, however, are graded as are the laws of man. The operation of a higher law in any particular case does not destroy the actuality of an inferior one. (Articles of Faith, Ch.12, p.220-221)*

Elder B. H. Roberts also explained the concept that all miracles involve adherence to natural laws, not all of which we currently understand.

*Two hundred years ago the only motive powers known to ocean navigators were wind and the ocean currents. Suppose at that time those old mariners had seen one of our modern ocean steamers running against both ocean currents and the wind, and, withal, making better speed, in spite of both wind and tide than the old sailing vessel could match even when running before the wind and the ocean currents in her favor. What would have been the effect on the mind of the old-time sailor? "It is a miracle!" he would have exclaimed; that is, it would have been an "effect contrary to the established constitution and course of things," "a derogation from recognized laws." But is such an effect to us who know something of the force of steam contrary to the laws of nature? No; it is simply the employment of forces in nature of which the old-time mariner was ignorant; and while it would have been a miracle to him, to us it is merely the application of a newly-discovered force of nature, and it is now so common that we cease to look upon it with wonder. So with the things that we in our ignorance call miracles—such as healing the sick, restoring the blind to sight, making the lame to walk, through exercise of faith; and the resurrection of the dead—instead of these things being in derogation from recognized laws, we shall yet learn that they are done simply by the application of laws of which we are as yet in ignorance. With man's limited knowledge of the laws of nature, how presumptuous it is in him to say that the healing of the sick or even the resurrection of the dead are in "derogation of the laws of nature," or that deviation from those few laws of nature with which he is acquainted will never happen, or is impossible! Better reasoners are they who, like George Rawlinson, say: "Miraculous interpositions on fitting occasions may be as much a regular, fixed, and established rule of his [God's] government, as the working ordinarily by what are called natural laws." In other words, what we in our ignorance call miracles, are to God merely the results of the application of higher laws or forces of nature not yet learned by man. Miracles are to be viewed as a part of the divine economy. (The Seventy's Course in Theology, Fourth Year, p.79-80)*

In short, what this means is that there is a natural reason or cause for literally every miracle ever wrought. A miracle, then, is only the application of higher laws of physics that we do not yet understand. President Spencer W. Kimball brings this concept home by suggesting that all of the miracles in the scriptures will someday be understood as natural events that followed natural laws.

*Miracles may involve rearrangement of natural phenomena. It is a miracle to force water uphill through a siphon, until we understand it. The lesser law of gravity is suspended while the air-pressure law is permitted to work.*

*The skeptic might say that the Red Sea episode of history was impossible, but people who have been to Egypt say that occasionally strong winds blow the water from the shallow portions of the sea, leaving it sufficiently dry for passage. Surely God could operate the natural laws in such a manner. Or the plagues of Egypt: A change in climatic conditions might foster the breeding of countless hordes of lice or flies or locusts and a lack of vegetation in other parts cause their migration to the rich valleys of the Nile at just the proper time to afflict Pharaoh and his people, and the very presence and filth of these pests would perhaps bring as a logical sequence the then-incurable epidemic to strike the members of every household in death and make possible the flight of the Israelites. Such*

*a disease is not hard to imagine when we remember the death and misery in our own ranks brought about by the first epidemic of flu in 1918 and 1919. (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.500)*

As President Kimball implies, this doctrine of “natural miracles” is somewhat of a two-edged sword for critics of Mormonism. On the one hand, people have criticized religious miracles for centuries by stating that it is impossible to contradict natural laws and, therefore, the fantastic stories found in the scriptures must be false. This narrow-minded view of both miracles and natural law has been used to criticize Mormonism and religion in general. These people seem to be quite arrogant in their view of natural laws, believing that there is nothing more we can learn or no possible interpretation of these amazing events.

On the other hand, those who firmly believe in the God of the great western theologians tend to interpret the LDS view of miracles as belittling God in some way or succumbing to natural reasoning and science. These criticisms are likewise absurd as we are far from understanding how God has performed most, if not all, of these mighty works. God’s understanding of natural laws seems to so far surpass our own as to be all but unreachable to us without his help. It is somewhat ironic to note that while many of these religious believers criticize the LDS concept of miracles, they also criticize our belief that miracles still occur today. They tend to believe that God no longer performs miracles in these latter days...irony indeed!

Yet, in spite of the narrow-mindedness of each criticism, LDS theology will undoubtedly continue to be condemned by both camps. This, however, is of little consequence as we continue to preach and maintain that God is the great performer of miracles, both past and present, that his understanding far surpasses our own, and that he will continue to use that great understanding of natural laws to perform works that to us seem impossible. As if to address both types of critics, the prophet Moroni boldly testifies of the reality of miracles:

*And now, O all ye that have imagined up unto yourselves a god who can do no miracles, I would ask of you, have all these things passed, of which I have spoken? Has the end come yet? Behold I say unto you, Nay; and God has not ceased to be a God of miracles.*

*Behold, are not the things that God hath wrought marvelous in our eyes? Yea, and who can comprehend the marvelous works of God?*

*Who shall say that it was not a miracle that by his word the heaven and the earth should be; and by the power of his word man was created of the dust of the earth; and by the power of his word have miracles been wrought?*

*And who shall say that Jesus Christ did not do many mighty miracles? And there were many mighty miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles.*

*And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles.  
(Mormon 9:15-19)*

This seems tantamount to saying that God is still involved with his children today just as much as he has been in the past. And as long as God is involved with us, it seems reasonable to assume that he will continue to perform works involving natural laws that we do not yet understand such as healing the sick, hearing our prayers, and speaking to us through the Holy Ghost. We should understand that all of these miracles, as well as many others that could be listed, are both real and obey natural laws of the universe that we are likely to understand someday ourselves.

### **Omniscience - All Knowing**

As with omnipotence and omnipresence, Mormon theologians would generally claim that God is omniscient, but not in the same way that traditional theologians have advanced. This has come as a surprise even to many Latter-day Saints as they have encountered these teachings. LDS leaders have not only been open to the idea that God is still progressing in knowledge, many of them have openly taught this principle with great force. In addition, the First Presidency has actually publicly rebuked some leaders in the LDS church for teaching that God is omniscient in the literal sense.<sup>3</sup>

We'll begin this discussion with certain LDS scriptures that seem to indicate that God is still progressing in knowledge. In section 130 of the Doctrine and Covenants, for example, we find some interesting information about how communication occurs in the heavens.

*The place where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim.*

*This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal and will be a Urim and Thummim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon, whereby all things pertaining to an inferior kingdom, or all kingdoms of a lower order, will be manifest to those who dwell on it; and this earth will be Christ's. (D&C 130:8-9)*

Notice first that this earth, when it becomes a celestial kingdom, will act as a great communicator of truth to the inhabitants who live there. Notice also that this communication pertains only to those kingdoms of an “inferior” or “lower” order. The explanation goes on to outline other types of communication received by these beings – communication that pertains to a “higher order of kingdoms.”

*Then the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual who receives one, whereby things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms will be made known;*

*And a white stone is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom... (D&C 130:10-11)*

Notice that a white stone is given to each being in the celestial kingdom, the highest kingdom in the heavens of which we are aware. This white stone reveals things to its owner pertaining to a

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<sup>3</sup> See Messages of the First Presidency, Vol.2, p. 222 by James R. Clark.

higher order of kingdoms as opposed to the lower order previously discussed. Which higher order of kingdoms?

There are at least two possible answers to this question. The first involves the possibility that there are higher kingdoms than the celestial kingdom and that these celestial beings are obtaining information about those higher kingdoms via the white stone. The other possibility is that there are no higher kingdoms than the celestial kingdom, but that there are multiple celestial kingdoms. Hence, this scripture could be suggesting that these celestial beings use the white stone to communicate with peers from other celestial worlds or other “higher kingdoms” throughout the universe. In either scenario, it seems clear that these celestial beings are still having things “made known” unto them and, hence, are still learning. This concept of being “omniscient” via a white stone seems to agree with other specific statements from scripture as well. For example,

*Thus saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ...the same which knoweth all things, for all things are present before mine eyes;... (D&C 38:1-2, underline added)*

One popular view of LDS theology is that God knows more than we could ever imagine and, at the same time, is still learning new concepts via this white stone. In this manner God would likely possess sufficient knowledge to handle virtually any problem dealing with this particular world, while at the same time having access to much more knowledge at his fingertips, perhaps even all the knowledge that exists.

As we have mentioned earlier, Mormonism teaches that God was not always a god. He had to progress and advance in knowledge and wisdom the same way that each of us is doing, namely, line upon line and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.<sup>4</sup> It stands to reason that if one continues to learn in this manner, there will never be a time when all the information from an endless universe will be known. Learning in this manner, it is simply impossible to learn about the edge of the universe or the highest number or anything of an infinite nature. In addition, before God became a god, there were other gods who went before him. It is reasonable to assume that space is filled with gods upon whom our God can call for information and knowledge.

Some in the LDS church have championed this concept very well. For example, Hyrum Andrus once wrote,

*Though God knows all things within His vast domain and has access to the truth and power of higher realms within the divine patriarchal order of eternity, He is continually progressing in truth as he advances from one level of celestial glory and power to a higher one. Those within that celestial system are continually moving upward into greater and greater degrees of refinement and power, and to higher and higher realms of celestial life. (Doctrinal Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price, p. 507)*

Likewise, Elder B. H. Roberts once said,

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Nephi 28:30

*And so in every inhabited world, and in every system of worlds, a God presides. Deity in his own right and person, and by virtue of the essence of him; and also by virtue of His being the sign and symbol of the collectivity of the Divine Intelligences of the universe. Having access to all the councils of the Gods, each individual Deity becomes a partaker of the collective knowledge, wisdom, honor, power, majesty, and glory of the Body Divine,... (Mormon Doctrine of Deity, p. 198)*

The list of LDS priesthood leaders who have advanced this notion is formidable.

*...there is progress for our Father and for our Lord Jesus. There is no such thing as standing still in the eternal work of our God. It is endless progress, progressing from one degree of knowledge to another degree. (President George Q. Cannon, Gospel Truth 1:118)*

*All organized existence is in progress to an endless advancement in eternal perfections,...there is no point in all the eternities, where organized existence will become stationary, that it cannot advance in knowledge, wisdom, power, and glory. All things that have come within the bounds of man's knowledge--the things he naturally understands--teach him that there is no period, in all the eternities, where organized existence will become stationary, that it cannot advance in knowledge, wisdom, power, and glory. (President Brigham Young, commenting on Abraham 3:26, Journal of Discourses 1:349)*

*Some men seem as if they could learn so much and no more. They appear to be bounded in their capacity for acquiring knowledge, as Brother Orson Pratt, has in theory, bounded the capacity of God. According to his theory, God can progress no further in knowledge and power; but the God that I serve is progressing eternally, and so are his children: they will increase to all eternity, if they are faithful. (President Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses 11:286)*

*...we will continue on improving, advancing and increasing in wisdom, intelligence, power and dominion, worlds without end. (President Lorenzo Snow, Conference Report, April 1901, p. 2)*

*If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed any further, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent and reflecting mind. God himself is increasing and progressing in knowledge, power, and dominion, and will do so, world without end. It is just so with us. (President Wilford Woodruff, Journal of Discourses 6:120)*

*While the body may reach the limit of its development in a few years, the spirit is of a different character. It, too, may reach the limit of its dimensions; but never perhaps will it reach to the limit of its capacity to acquire knowledge, power and understanding. There is no limit to growth and development in this direction, so far as we have any knowledge; for there is no end to progression. God our Heavenly Father is still progressing. ...then I repeat that even God our Heavenly Father has not reached the*

*ultimatum of His greatness, His power, or His capacity, but that He is continually increasing and expanding in power, in dominion, in glory and in greatness, if I may be permitted to use such terms as these which some people who know no better would call blasphemous, in connection with the Supreme Being, the Father of us all. (President Joseph F. Smith, Collected Discourses, Vol.5, February 16, 1896)*

When one suggests that there are things that God does not know, someone always asks whether it is possible for God to make a mistake. People are afraid that if God is not omniscient in the literal sense, he might learn something that will thwart the plan of salvation. We worry that perhaps He has overlooked something. Even if this were the case, it seems senseless to worry about such things for several reasons.

We must consider that God has access to all the knowledge of all the Gods there have ever been throughout all eternity. I don't think we can comprehend how much knowledge that is. For example, when I was in college I used to look at some of my professors and wonder if I would ever know as much as they did. With some of them, it seemed almost impossible to have that much knowledge. Then I would look at the entire department of professors and wonder how much knowledge they must possess as a whole group. The thought of this much knowledge amazed me. Then I considered the entire university. If I could have immediate access to everything that every teacher on the entire campus understood, what an incredible thing that would be. It would be safe to say that nobody on earth could come close to matching that kind of knowledge. Then I imagined having access to all the knowledge possessed by every person in the entire world. Think of all the questions that could be answered concerning almost any topic. And yet, it is reasonable to assume that this would only be a drop in the bucket when compared with the knowledge to which God has access. How many Gods have gone before our God and his Christ? How many have paved the way and proven the plans, truths, and principles that He is now bringing to pass? There is very little, if any, room for doubt under such circumstances, especially for us with our petty understanding of things. To not exercise exceedingly great faith in such a being would be as irrational of a choice as we could possibly make.

If we are to continue learning forever, it follows that we will be exercising faith forever as well – faith in the things learned from the white stone and faith in the future of the plan of salvation as it has been handed down to us by all the generations of gods that have gone before. In order to be given access to all the knowledge possessed by all the gods, one would have to reach a level of righteousness and faith that would insure the correct use of that knowledge. Indeed the possession of righteousness and faith would seem to be the qualifying factors in deciding who becomes a god and who does not. Under these circumstances, how much knowledge is necessary in order to be a god? Is it possible to have faith that something is true and act upon it without knowing all there is to know about it? I dare say that few, if any, know everything there is to know about any one principle of the universe. Yet, it is possible to move forward and to act upon it that principle with very successful results.

Is it too far fetched to suggest that God does the same, but at a much higher level than we can imagine? If we possess true faith and an absolute love of truth and people, we will always seek out, cling to, and properly act upon truth. If I were perfect in these qualities, almost regardless of

my knowledge, I could be the Lord's prophet tomorrow and never lead the people astray. Faith makes it possible for fourteen year-old boys, with third grade educations, to bring into the world some of the greatest truths ever known to man, and not only to bring them into the world, but to live them as well.

What, then, does it require to become a God? President Brigham Young offers us a definition of perfection that we don't often consider, but which seems to apply well to the topic at hand.

*We all occupy diversified stations in the world, and in the kingdom of God. Those who do right, and seek the glory of the Father in heaven, whether their knowledge be little or much, or whether they can do little or much, if they do the very best they know how, they are perfect... 'Be ye as perfect as ye can', for that is all we can do, tho' it is written, 'Be ye perfect as your Father who is in heaven is perfect'. To be as perfect as we possibly can according to our knowledge, is to be just as perfect as our Father in heaven is. He cannot be anymore perfect than he knows how, any more than we...the sin that will cleave to all the posterity of Adam and Eve is, that they have not done as well as they know how. (Deseret News Weekly, 31 August 1854, p. 37)*

Notice that there is no sin in not possessing knowledge, the sin is in not acting upon or obeying it. And this is what prevents us from understanding God and becoming like God ourselves. Along these same lines, President Spencer W. Kimball has stated,

*Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most truly vital is the knowledge of God, of his existence, his powers, his love, and his promises. Through this knowledge, we can learn that our great objective in life is to build character. In fact we learn that the building of faith and character is paramount, for character is higher than intellect, and perfect character will continually be rewarded with increased intellect. Thus our real business on earth is to master self. And as we master ourselves, we will learn to master the earth and it's elements...And let us remember that it is not so much what we know that is important, as what we do and what we are. The master's plan is a program of doing, of living, not merely knowing. Knowledge itself is not the end. It is how we righteously live and apply that knowledge in our lives and how we apply it to help others that describes our character. (Ensign, Seek Learning Even by Study and also by Faith, September 1983)*

Notice in President Kimball's statement that though knowledge is important, it is the application of that knowledge that is the paramount issue. Would we be wrong to suggest that the same is true for all beings throughout the universe, even God himself?

Just like the attributes of omnipotence and omnipresence, LDS theology is not only open to the idea of God not being omniscient in the literal sense, but this doctrine has actually been taught from the pulpit and receives solid support from the scriptures as well. This, again, is rational theology that fits well with the bigger picture of who God has been in the past and what kind of being he will continue to be in the future. It tells us much of our own destiny, should we remain

faithful and obedient to God. In the end, I can only support the sentiments expressed by President Wilford Woodruff on this subject when he said,

*If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed any further, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent and reflecting mind. God himself is increasing and progressing in knowledge, power, and dominion, and will do so, world without end. It is just so with us. (Journal of Discourses 6:120)*

It is important for us to note that when we obey God we are, in reality, obeying the grand council of all gods throughout the known universe. We, ourselves, become part of a much larger system and partakers of “the collectivity of the Divine Intelligences of the universe,” just like God himself.

### **Timelessness - All Time Is One “Eternal Now”**

As has already been alluded to, LDS theology holds to the belief that God obeys the law of time. In other words, God is inside of time and does not view all time, past, present, and future, as one eternal now. It may be true that God can see anything he wishes to in the past and that he can predict certain future events with extreme accuracy, however, the physical presence of God only exists in the present. In addition to God obeying the law of time by being in one place at one time, it is clear from LDS scriptures that God measures and keeps track of time.<sup>5</sup>

For Latter-day Saints, this concept should hold particular meaning and significance. For if God is outside of time, then his progression onto godhood becomes a meaningless issue. It would suggest that God is watching himself become a god and that, in a certain sense, God would have always been a god. He would at this very moment be watching himself in all phases of his existence all at once, thus creating an infinite number of individuals who all represent one being, while at the same time, not representing that being at all. It is very confusing and makes little or no sense whatsoever.

In addition, since Latter-day Saints hold to the concept that man may become as God now is, the concept of timelessness would imply that all of those beings that will ever become gods at any time in the future are already gods right now, and are at this time somehow watching themselves advance to that status. They would be gods and not gods at the same time, which is clearly contradictory.

Even if God only exists in one time at once, some might supposed that God could travel through time. This also becomes fairly problematic, especially as it applies to traveling into the past. If, for example, God could travel into the past and actually exist in that particular time, as opposed to only viewing it as perhaps we would view a television, then we could suppose that there were actually two of the same being in existence at the same time. This then would form an eternal loop in time that could not be broken. For whenever God came to that point that he returned to a previous point in time, he would always go back. Then time would advance again until He hits

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<sup>5</sup> See D&C 130:4-5; Abraham 3:4-5; Abraham 3:9. It should also be noted that Alma 40:8 could be interpreted to indicate that God does not measure time. However, it is more likely that this principle was either not fully understood by Alma or that Alma was teaching a lower form of this principle at that time.

that point again, and he would go back in time. This scenario of time moving forward and then back again would never end. It would create an endless loop of time.

If God could go back in time, we could also conclude that he could change something in the past that, as a result, somehow changed the future. This scenario creates so many logical contradictions as to be completely ridiculous. For example, could God go back in time and change something that would delay his progress, thus not allowing him to become a god until much later in time? If so, it is conceivable that God would not have been able to go back in time to make that change in the first place, because he wasn't a god yet. We would then have the problem of trying to explain what or who made the change in the past in the first place that delayed god's ability to go back in time. The only answer we could offer is that it was God because he went back in time and at the same time it wasn't God because he didn't yet have the power to go back in time. This is clearly a logical contradiction and is, therefore, impossible.

These logical contradictions also apply to anything else God might change in the past. If God went back in time and changed some future event, we are left with the question of whether that future event ever happened. If so, when did it happen? Is it possible, for example, to have a memory of an event that was changed and therefore, never occurred in the first place? This clearly creates another logical contradiction; for the event would have both happened and not happened.

All of this makes very little sense from a traditional religious standpoint. However, it makes even less sense when viewed from an LDS standpoint.

Perhaps the best way to view time is not as an entity in and of itself, but rather merely as change within the universe. For all intents and purposes, time is little more or less than change. If, for example, everything in the universe were to stop, with no change whatsoever, for a matter of five minutes, it would be as though no time existed for that duration. Even God himself would not know that time had passed, assuming he did not change in any way as well. Likewise, if God were able to stop all change in the universe except for himself, and he continued to view things in their static and stationary state, it would be as though all time had stopped for all beings except God. We would not know the difference in any way. Under this view, if a person wanted to travel into the future, one way to accomplish this is to stop changing in any way. If, for example, you were to be frozen for the space of ten years and the rest of the universe kept changing during that period, you would awake to find that you had traveled ten years into the future. However, this view of time travel is unlikely to satisfy the avid fan of science fiction.

For all intents and purposes it appears that the law of time is a natural law that even God himself cannot alter or defy. The God of LDS theology must exist in time and does not have the ability to travel either into the past or into the future.

### **Immutability – Unchangeable**

As with many of these attributes of God, LDS theology doesn't completely reject the concept of immutability as an attribute of God. Mormonism clearly teaches that God is immutable or unchangeable. However, it teaches that God is immutable in a very different way than

traditional Judeo-Christian theology. LDS scriptures speak of God being unchangeable in certain ways. For example,

*For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity. (Moroni 8:18)*

*By these things we know that there is a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth, and all things which are in them; (D&C 20:17)*

Mormonism teaches that God is immutable in areas such as his goodness, mercy, justice, etc. The LDS concept of immutability, however, is not nearly so comprehensive as that proposed by the great western theologians. For example, as already discussed, the LDS concept of God includes the idea of God having a physical body. If, therefore, God moves his hand or wiggles his finger from time to time, then he has changed in some way. Likewise, LDS theology also teaches that God obeys the laws of space and time. Hence, God not only changes from time to time, but also from space to space. In other words, God moves around in space and time much the same way that you and I move around in space and time. He is not static in either time or space. In all of these ways God is changeable and changing all the time.

In addition, LDS theology is open to the idea of God progressing in several key areas such as knowledge and advancement in kingdoms. In this sense also, the God of LDS theology is not immutable. As Elder B. H. Roberts explains,

*His Immutability should be regarded as stability, adherence to principle. What stands among men under the name of "constitutional morality," fixed devotion to law; and working through law to the achievement of his divine purposes, rather than by caprice, or by arbitrary, personal action. But God's immutability should not be so understood as to exclude the idea of advancement or progress of God. Thus, for example: God's kingdom and glory may be enlarged, as more and more redeemed souls are added to his kingdom: as worlds and world-systems are multiplied and redeemed and enrolled with celestial spheres, so God's kingdom is enlarged and his glory increased. So that in this sense there may come change and progress even for God. Hence we could not say of God's immutability as we do of his eternity that it is absolute, since there may come change through progress even for God: but an absolute immutability would require eternal immobility—which would reduce God to a condition eternally static, which, from the nature of things, would bar him from participation in that enlargement of kingdom and increasing glory that comes from redemption and the progress of men. And is it too bold a thought, that with this progress, even for the Mightiest, new thoughts, and new vistas may appear, inviting to new adventures and enterprises that will yield new experiences, advancement, and enlargement even for the Most High? It ought to be constantly remembered that terms absolute to man may be relative terms to God, so far above our thinking is his thinking; and his ways above our ways. (Seventy's Course in Theology, "The Atonement," pp. 69-70)*

Clearly the LDS view of deity mandates that God has not only changed in the past as he experienced the process of progression, but that he is still changing today and will continue to change in many ways throughout eternity. The changes that God has experienced are easily acknowledged within the “couplet” provided to us by President Lorenzo Snow when he stated:

*I had a direct revelation of this. It was most perfect and complete. If there ever was a thing revealed to man perfectly, clearly, so that there could be no doubt or dubiety, this was revealed to me, and it came in these words: “As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be.” (President Lorenzo Snow, Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.5)*

As for God changing in the future, Joseph Smith, speaking as if he were Christ, once said:

*My Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. He then will take a higher exaltation and I will take his place, and thereby become exalted myself. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 347-348)*

The ramifications of this statement are significant. Suffice it to say for now that this implies change. It implies that God will continue to change as he moves to higher and higher exaltations. Of this concept, Elder James E. Talmage once wrote,

*It is reasonable to believe, in the absence of direct revelation by which alone absolute knowledge of the matter could be acquired, that, in accordance with God’s plan of eternal progressions, advancement from grade to grade within any kingdom, and from kingdom to kingdom, will be provided for. But if the recipients of a lower kingdom be enabled to advance, surely the intelligences of higher rank will not be stopped in their progress; and thus we may conclude, that degrees and grades will ever characterize the kingdoms of our God. Eternity is progressive; perfection is relative; the essential feature of God’s living purpose is its associated power of eternal increase. (Articles of Faith, 1899 edition, pp. 420-421)*

LDS scriptures help us to understand this principle as well.

*And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. (Abraham 3:26)*

President Brigham Young, commenting on this verse in Abraham, had the following to say on the subject of eternal change:

*All organized existence is in progress to an endless advancement in eternal perfections,...there is no point in all the eternities, where organized existence will become stationary, that it cannot advance in knowledge, wisdom, power, and glory. All things that have come within the bounds of man’s knowledge--the things he naturally*

*understands--teach him that there is no period, in all the eternities, where organized existence will become stationary, that it cannot advance in knowledge, wisdom, power, and glory. (Journal of Discourses 1:349)*

It is clear from these statements that LDS theology holds to the concept of God remaining constant and unchangeable in the various principles of the gospel such as virtue, love, justice, mercy, etc. Although the God of Mormonism is continually changing in many different ways, both he and the system of salvation that he himself adhered to in order to become a god in the first place, has not, is not, and in all likelihood, will not change. As President Brigham Young has stated,

*... when you speak of the system of salvation to bring back the children of Adam and Eve into the presence of our Father and God, it is the same in all ages, among all people, and under all circumstances, worlds without end. (TPBY 3:347-348)*

Again, in order to understand ourselves within this great plan of salvation, it is important that we understand God. For it is by understanding what manner of being God is and how he became a god in the first place that we will be able to make good decisions for our own life and begin to comprehend our own destiny – a destiny full of advancement, change, and progress.

### **Not Acted Upon - No Emotion Or Feeling**

Contrary to the ideas advanced by the great theologians, LDS theology not only claims that God has feelings, emotions, and passions, but that these things may actually be what makes God a god. In other words, it is God's love, empathy, compassion, mercy, etc. that are at the core of all things godly. It is these very traits that the gospel and Mormonism tout as being of true value and real worth in the universe. It is these qualities that bring lasting joy and happiness throughout eternity.

It appears that the great theologians were logically correct in stating that the possession of such traits would make it so that God reacts instead of merely acting. However, LDS theology would claim that this is the very thing we hope God will do, as well as the very thing spoken of him from holy writ. For example, in the gospel of John we find this clear response or reaction to the world based on his love for the world:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

This is clearly a reaction from God towards mankind because of his feelings for us. And again in Ephesians we see a God who reacts to people in need by having mercy upon them.

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (Ephesians 2:4)*

And again from the Book of Mormon:

*For he said: Thou art merciful, O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness; yea, thou wast merciful when I prayed concerning those who were mine enemies, and thou didst turn them to me. (Alma 33:4)*

It is a basic tenet of LDS theology that God hears and answers our prayers, loves us, has mercy on us, is compassionate, and, in short, responds to his children in many different ways.

Scriptures such as these tend to clearly show the differences between the man-made definition of God assigned to him by the great western theologians and the simple word of God given to us by those who have actually seen him and who have been told directly what manner of being he really is. Indeed, it would seem that in order to keep the philosopher's view of God we would have to throw away many of the plain and precious teachings of the holy scriptures, both ancient and modern. Such is the case when we say that God has no feelings or reactions to the universe around him. LDS theology boldly and gladly rejects this notion.

### **Self-Existent – No Cause For His Existence**

Mormonism teaches that God is a self-existent being. However, it views this self-existence in a very different way than traditional theology. Within LDS theology, God has always existed in one form or another and, as such, was not created or made “from nothing.” But God was not always a god. He progressed from one stage of existence to another over the course of time and eventually became a god. In addition, Mormonism teaches the doctrine that God is not the only self-existent being or thing in the universe. The basic elements of man and the universe are also self-existent with God.

Within Mormonism, all conscious beings have their beginnings in what is referred to as “intelligence” or sometimes simply as “spirit.” This intelligence is self-existent or co-eternal with God. Passages of scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants help to clarify this principle.

*Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. (D&C 93:29)*

*For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy; (D&C 93:33)*

It is important to note that both spirit and element are material things within Mormonism. This means that they actually exist within time and space and obey the laws of time and space.

*There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes;*

*We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter. (D&C 131:7-8)*

Hence, LDS doctrine teaches that God, in his earliest form was comprised of intelligent matter or spirit that has always existed in one form or another. However, this is just as true for the spirits of men as it is for God himself. Of this, Joseph Smith once taught,

*We say that God himself is a self-existent being. Who told you so? It is correct enough; but how did it get into your heads? Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? Man does exist upon the same principles. God made a tabernacle and put a spirit into it, and it became a living soul. (Refers to the old Bible.) How does it read in the Hebrew? It does not say in the Hebrew that God created the spirit of man. It says "God made man out of the earth and put into him Adam's spirit, and so became a living body."*

*The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal with God himself. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.351)*

*Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 354)*

Commenting on this last statement made by the prophet, Elder B. H. Roberts once said,

*"A spirit from age to age"—not "spirit from age to age"; but "a spirit," that is, an entity, a person, an individual. This paragraph in the Prophet's remarks may well be taken as an interpretation of D&C, Sec. 93:29 [quoted above]. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 354 footnotes)*

Hence, although LDS doctrine clearly teaches that the basic elements can and have changed over time, it also teaches that these elements in their native form were never created or made, neither indeed can be. They are self-existent in that sense.

This still leaves a burning question within us: "What caused all of this self-existent matter to exist in the first place?" If we remember, Saint Anselm proposed that everything in the universe exists because of one of three reasons:

1. Because of something else,
2. Because of nothing, or
3. Because of itself

Anselm himself tried to reduce this down to just two options instead of the three listed.

*For something to have its existence explained by nothing is for it to exist and yet not for there to be no explanation whatever of the fact that it exists rather than not. Could there be something of this sort – something whose existence is simply an unintelligible, brute fact, having no explanation whatever? Anselm's answer, whether correct or not, is perfectly clear: "It is utterly inconceivable that what is something should exist through nothing." Unfortunately, Anselm gives us no explanation as to why we cannot conceive*

*of something whose existence is an unintelligible brute fact. (William L. Rowe, Philosophy of Religion, An Introduction, p. 10)*

So, why can't things simply exist in the universe? Contrary to Saint Anselm's unexplained reasoning that nothing can exist without a cause, Mormonism seems open to the idea that some things can simply exist for no reason or cause. They have always existed and will continue to always exist in one form or another. Perhaps this helps us to better understand the discussion between Abraham and God as found in the Pearl of Great Price. In this discussion, God seems to be explaining to Abraham that some facts simply exist and that the nature of these facts is that there are differences between them so that one is above another.

*... if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other, yet these two spirits, notwithstanding one is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolaum, or eternal.*

*And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.<sup>6</sup> (Abraham 3:18-19)*

Mormonism teaches that this may be exactly the case – that there are things in the universe that simply have always existed in one form or another. Among these are matter, space, intelligences, and the natural laws that govern each of these categories. These are all self-existent entities in the universe. Under this view, the entire gospel plan can now be viewed as a system of higher intelligences helping lesser or weaker intelligences to advance, grow, progress, and learn that they may become like the gods and experience the highest level of joy and happiness. Of this concept Joseph Smith once taught that,

*... if I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house-tops that God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself.*

*Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it...*

*The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding He was in the midst of spirits and glory, because He was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 354)*

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note here the Lord is only showing Abraham a specific set of intelligences in this vision. This statement should not be interpreted to indicate that there are no other beings in the entire universe that are more intelligent than God.

And again from the Book of Abraham we find a similar statement about God's early involvement with these self-existent intelligences:

*I [God] dwell in the midst of them all; ... I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen.*

*Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;*

*And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born.*

*And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; (Abraham 3:21-24)*

This leads us to one of the most basic beliefs of LDS theology regarding self-existence and progression; that although we are all self-existent beings, God himself was once an intelligence that was helped in his progression by a higher being than himself. This likely occurred in much the same way that God is now helping us in our progression.

*These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible. (Joseph Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.345)*

*We know that we are created in the image of God, both male and female; and whoever goes back into the presence of God our Eternal Father, will ... learn that he has placed us here that we may pass through a state of probation and experience, the same as he himself did in his day of mortality. (President Wilford Woodruff, Journal of Discourses 18:32)*

*I had a direct revelation of this. It was most perfect and complete. If there ever was a thing revealed to man perfectly, clearly, so that there could be no doubt or dubiety, this was revealed to me, and it came in these words: "As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be." (President Lorenzo Snow, Teachings of Lorenzo Snow, p.5)*

Just how the first god of all the gods was transformed from native element or raw intelligence into a god is a mystery that has not yet been revealed. However, LDS doctrine clearly teaches the self-existence of God. Yet, it also teaches the self-existence of man and the elements of the universe. It is also important to note that the LDS definition of self-existence excludes the idea of always existing in the same form. There clearly was a time when God became a god, just like

others before him. However, this seems to be merely a process of changing pre-existing elements from one state of existence into another in order to create a “perfect” being. It will be interesting to someday learn how it all started and how long ago.

### **Creator “Ex Nihilo” Or From “Nothing”**

Closely related to the ideas expressed concerning self-existence, Mormonism teaches that God did not create the universe “from nothing.” Rather, literally everything that God has made was “created” from pre-existing materials. Again, we can refer to the Doctrine and Covenants for the basic teachings on this issue:

*Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. (D&C 93:29)*

*For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy; (D&C 93:33)*

LDS theology boldly declares that God not only created, or rather “organized, everything from pre-existing materials, but that God lacks the very power to create something from nothing. Or, to steal a phrase from Thomas Aquinas, “it is more appropriate to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, unlike the western theologians, LDS theology states that there are certain natural laws that even God must obey. One such law is that matter cannot be brought into existence or cease to exist. It can only be reorganized or formed into something else.

Using the Hebrew Bible as a reference, Joseph Smith explained this concept of creation or organization:

*Now, the word create came from the word baurau which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos — chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Pg.350)*

This concept of organizing pre-existing materials applies not only to things like the earth, moon, and planets, but also to all conscious, intelligent beings as well. Again, the prophet explains this principle to us:

*In tracing the thing to the foundation, and looking at it philosophically, we shall find a very material difference between the body and the spirit; the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit, by many, is thought to be immaterial, without substance.*

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<sup>7</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1, Q 25, Art. 3. in The Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York Random House, 1945)

*With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ, and state the spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body; that it existed before the body, can exist in the body; and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be moldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection be again united with it. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Pg.207)*

It is easy to see that LDS doctrine differs greatly from that of the great western theologians regarding how the universe and mankind was created. The more proper way to state the LDS concept of creation is perhaps to use the term “organize” instead of create.<sup>8</sup> This also clearly has an impact on how we should view the omnipotence of God.

### **Perfectly Good**

The attribute of perfect goodness is one of the few attributes in which traditional theology and LDS views almost completely agree. Mormonism is quite clear on its views regarding the goodness of God. LDS theology proclaims “the infinite goodness of God”<sup>9</sup> throughout its teachings. In fact, according to LDS scripture, it is the very work and glory of God “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”<sup>10</sup> that we may be “filled with joy.”<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps one of the greatest statements made throughout the entire canon of LDS scripture was the simple utterance of the prophet Lehi when he said,

*Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. (2 Nephi 2:25)*

For Mormonism, the whole goal and desire of God is to give us more joy and happiness. The entire goal and purpose of life, then, is to lead us to more joy and happiness by incorporating righteous and holy principles into our very natures, thus making us more like God. Just how God accomplishes this will be discussed later in the section covering the problem of evil from an LDS perspective.

LDS doctrine teaches, then, that in order to obey the commandment of becoming perfect “even as” our Father in heaven is perfect, we must excel in the areas of goodness ourselves, which in turn will bring us lasting joy and happiness. The core principles such as faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity, hope, love, humility, gentleness, meekness, diligence, holiness, lowliness of heart, long suffering, and all others found in the scriptures are at the heart of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ through the prophet Joseph Smith. LDS theology teaches not only that God exemplifies such principles, but also that he is active in helping each of us become as he is in each of these principles.

The one major difference between the LDS view of the goodness of God and that of traditional theology is that Mormonism teaches that God was not always God and hence, there was a time in the past when God was perhaps not wholly good. He became wholly good over time.

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<sup>8</sup> See Abraham chapter 4 for a scriptural example of using the term “organize” instead of “create.”

<sup>9</sup> Mosiah 5:3

<sup>10</sup> Moses 1:39

<sup>11</sup> Alma 22:15

Suffice it so say that LDS theology holds to the belief that God, in his current state, is wholly good in that he seeks the welfare and joy of other beings in the universe. His very nature is to eliminate all the sorrow and pain that he can while promoting the greatest amount of joy and happiness that he can.

## ***Overcoming The Problems Of The Judeo-Christian View Of God***

Although it seems unlikely that Joseph Smith had any intention of setting out to solve the major philosophical problems provided by the great western theologians, it is clear that, to a large extent, his view of God accomplishes just that. Ironically, the very concepts that keep many religious critics looking down their noses at Mormonism are also the very things that overcome the strongest arguments from their greatest critics as well. It is true that there are many questions still to left answer. Mormonism in its current state is by no means a comprehensive answer to all of our questions. However, as we will see, at least some of the major issues and conflicts of religion can be explained much more adequately within the realms of Mormonism. This section attempts to show the strength of the LDS view of God as it applies to the major criticisms of the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of God.

### **The Problem Of Evil**

Given the attributes of God taught to us by Joseph Smith and his followers, the problem of evil changes in significant ways. These changes open the door to many possibilities regarding why evil exists and what God's relationship is with evil.

The first principle to consider is that there are other co-eternal or self-existent things in the universe besides God. In other words, God did not create anything from "nothing." When He created or organized this world and began to place people upon it, he had to deal with the pre-existing factors over which he had little or no control. For example, eternal realities that are outside of God's absolute control include at least the basic elements or chaotic matter, individual intelligences or spirits, and the natural laws and principles concerning time and space. All of these eternal elements came with their own set of eternal characteristics. God had to operate within the framework of these eternal characteristics. This changes the way in which the problem of evil is presented. The following argument is one way to express the LDS version of the problem of evil:

1. God is omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good, and organized a world out of pre-existing elements and intelligences.
2. An omnipotent being can do anything consistent with the nature of other eternal realities. (God can do anything that obeys both logical and natural laws.)
3. An omniscient being has access to all the knowledge possessed by the council of all the gods.
4. A wholly good being will prevent all the evil it possibly can.
5. Evils exist.
6. Therefore, whatever evils exist are (given the nature of eternal realities or natural laws) either:

- a. Unpreventable by God absolutely due to some eternal reality, or
- b. Unpreventable by God without thereby preventing some greater good.

This clearly changes the argument quite a bit and provides a tremendous amount of flexibility when trying to understand why evil exists and why God allows it to exist.

Consider for a moment the different kinds of worlds that God could have created or organized. Regarding the existence of evil, there are basically four possibilities. These four possibilities are outlined in the diagram below.



Using the process of elimination we can narrow down these possible worlds to identify the world that, given the nature of eternal realities, makes the most sense and is most likely to exist.

World III

As we consider each of these worlds a few things ought to become apparent. For example, it should be noted that World III is not a possible world. This is because it is simply a logical contradiction. It is impossible to have the good qualities of courage, compassion, empathy, patience, etc. unless there are some evils in existence that justify or validate those qualities. In other words, you cannot possess these qualities without the existence of evil. Upon what or whom would you have mercy or compassion if there were no evil? What good thing in the world would require patience? In what circumstances could you show courage that didn't involve some form of evil? Hence, as far as our discussion of evil is concerned, World III provides a logical contradiction and can therefore be crossed off our list of God's possible creations.

### World IV

World IV represents the world most people feel should be possible within traditional, Judeo-Christian theology. The problem of evil basically asks, “Why didn’t God create World IV?” Again, the only reason we feel the characteristics of mercy, compassion, patience, etc. are good in the first place is because they counteract some evil. If God had created the universe without evil, there would simply be no need for these qualities. Hence, the problem that traditional theology struggles to answer deals almost entirely with the non-existence of World IV.

Within LDS theology, it is important to understand that God did not create the eternal intelligences throughout the universe and that not all intelligences or spirits exist on equal ground. There are differences between them that God did not create or cause in any way. As discussed earlier, via the Book of Abraham we learn that these differences existed before God even encountered these beings.

*Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;*

*And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. (Abraham 3:22-23, underline added)*

Notice that God “saw” that these great and noble souls were good. He did not make them that way. And again, from Joseph Smith himself we learn that not all intelligences were “great and noble” at the time God first stood in their midst. There were some that were “weaker” or perhaps not as valiant as others.

*The first principles of man are self-existent with God. God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.354, underline added)*

It seems reasonable to assume that since not all intelligences exist on equal ground, some being “great and noble” and others not, that there would also be differences in the way these intelligences choose between good and evil. It is reasonable to assume that, when allowed to do so, many, if not all, of these self-existent intelligences will choose evil from time to time, some of them with great frequency. As Joseph Smith explained, it is God’s purpose to help these intelligences advance from their current state to a better, higher state of being. This is what the plan of salvation is all about – helping weaker intelligences to advance and progress to become like God.

This leaves God with some interesting decisions when choosing to create the best possible world. Is it even possible to create a world populated with various types of intelligences as described above and have it contain no evil? How do you get imperfect intelligences to always choose the right and never to choose to do evil? This is where the LDS view of Satan's plan comes into play. It seems that the only way to "guarantee" that no evil will occur within a world filled with "weaker intelligences" is to take away their free will or agency. If you can somehow force each, individual intelligence to do what is right, then World IV becomes a real possibility. As President John Taylor explains, this is apparently what Satan wanted to do.

*Now, we are told that Satan rebelled against God. He could not rebel against a law if that law had not been given; he could not have violated a commandment if that commandment did not exist. And we are told that he sought to take away the agency of man, to make man a poor miserable serf; and then to take his own course in regard to the destiny of the human family. But God would not have it so; and because of his rebelling he cast Lucifer out of heaven and with him one-third of the hosts of heaven because of their departure from God and his laws, and because they sought to pervert the counsel of God, and violate those principles which he had introduced for the salvation of the world which was to be, and upon which we now dwell. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.22, p.301)*

The question can now be asked, "What was wrong with Satan's plan that it was rejected by God?" We have at least two options. First, it is possible that God simply can't take away man's agency. Perhaps it is simply a part of the nature of intelligences to have free will. The second option is that God cannot take away our agency without thereby hindering our progress and thwarting the entire plan. For example, if the agency of man were to be taken away, we would have to question the very nature of mankind's existence. Without agency, what would be the difference between man and some sort of computer? Computers possess much "knowledge" but lack the ability to act for themselves except according to their pre-created programming. They cannot do other than that which they have been programmed or caused to do. Computers are a good example of something that obeys perfectly and never varies from that which they have been created and programmed to do. The only mistakes they make come from the mistakes imposed upon them by their creators. Yet, computers do not make their own choices and they do not feel joy or sorrow. It would seem that similar conditions would exist with mankind should we take away their agency to freely act for themselves. Under these circumstances, people would be more like machines than people – merely reacting to external influences rather than freely acting for themselves. It calls into question the very existence of mankind. This seems to be what the following verses in Doctrine and Covenants are trying to teach us:

*Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.*

*All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence.*

*Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light. (D&C 93:29-31, underline added)*

It seems to be the case that without agency or the power to act for ourselves, our very existence as conscious individuals would be in question.

*The expression “free agency” is typically employed by the Saints as a way of referring to what the scriptures identify as agency or moral agency, both scriptural terms that clearly refer to the power of choice within each human being that makes us morally responsible before God for our beliefs and actions. Understood in that light, it is simply not possible for anyone or any institution to take away one’s agency without taking away life itself. For what is called agency in the Book of Mormon is the power in each human being to distinguish between light and darkness, good and evil, right and wrong; agency identifies the capacity to distinguish and choose between those large moral alternatives. (FARMS, Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 7, Number 1, p.252, underline added)*

Concerning the existence of World IV, President Joseph Fielding Smith once taught,

*... if our Eternal Father refused to permit evil to exist in the world, he would destroy one of the greatest gifts ever given to man--the gift of free agency. Take this great gift away and there could be no rewards or punishments; no exaltation and no condemnation. ... This is indeed the very plan that Lucifer presented in the great council in heaven. It is absolutely necessary to permit evil as well as it is necessary to reward good. Without the great gift of free agency, heaven would be destroyed and hell and Satan would gain the victory. There is a divine law that will bring rewards and punishment. [See 2 Nephi 2:11-13.] (Answers to Gospel Questions, Vol. 3, p.125)*

When all is said and done, it is unclear whether or not God has the power to literally take away the agency of man. Yet, whether it is simply impossible or merely impossible without eliminating some greater good, God clearly chose to fight for our freedom while Satan clearly chose to take that freedom away. As President George Q. Cannon explains:

*God will not take away our agency. He has given you and me our agency to do as we please. I will not say that He cannot take away our agency; that would be irreverent; but it is not consistent with His plan to take away anybody’s agency. Every human being has his agency. We can serve God or we can serve the devil. We can listen to the voice of the Spirit of God and the entreaties that we hear from it, or we can reject them and listen to evil blandishments and allurements. (Collected Discourses, Vol.3)*

And again,

*The world generally have the idea that when truth comes from God, it comes in such overwhelming power, that mankind are compelled to accept whether they will or no. But this is not the case, it never has been the case. If it were the case man would be deprived of that great privilege that he has received from God--that is, his agency, without which man would cease to be the being that he is, the child of God. The Almighty has given unto all the inhabitants of the earth their agency. A man can choose to be a wicked man; he can choose to be a devil, so to speak, if he wish. Will God interpose? Yes; but not to*

*take away his agency. He can turn to wickedness, be corrupt, and do everything that is evil and abominable in the sight of God, so long as life is given to him, and God permits him to do it. He will not take away his agency. If He did, we would cease to be independent creatures with the right to choose. On the other hand, a man can turn to that which is good and holy and pure. He can cherish it, he can seek for it, he can love it. He has that right, he can choose between those two principles. They have been placed before us so that we might choose the good and reject the evil, or choose the evil and reject the good. That is the privilege that is given to us. (George Q. Cannon, Journal of Discourses, Vol.22, p.369)*

This being the case, LDS theology would claim that World IV is impossible as a mortal world for one of two reasons:

1. Moral agency or free will is simply a part of the eternal nature of self-existent intelligences. Therefore, neither God nor Satan have the power to take away man's agency. Or,
2. It is possible to take away man's moral agency, but not without destroying life and the very existence of man as a conscious, responsible being in the universe. This, in turn, would also thwart God's very purposes of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.

For Mormonism, World IV might only occur if God decided not to help us to progress or evolve beyond our lowly state as basic intelligences. Which, of course, would imply the creation of no world at all, at least as far as mankind is concerned. If, however, God chooses to help intelligences progress and experience more joy, World IV is not a possible world due to the natural laws and structure of the universe. God's purpose is to create the best possible world to promote the advancement and progression of these self-existent beings so that they might progress, evolve, and receive joy. Some of these beings are "great and noble" spirits and others are "weaker" or not so great and noble. These individual intelligences simply have tendencies towards wickedness, selfishness, and evil long before God ever begins to work with them. Hence, because God is unable to take away their freedom of choice either absolutely or without causing some greater evil, evil necessarily exists in the universe. It is impossible to bring about a world full of intelligent, but imperfect beings, without the existence of evil. Hence, we can cross off World IV as a possible world.

### World II

This brings us to World II as a possible world that God could have created. Of the two remaining options of Worlds, I and II, it would be almost unbearable to imagine World II – a world so filled with lopsided evil that little or no good occurs. World II is a world without hope or progress. It is a world that is mere chaos. It would be inconsistent with the known goodness of God to bring to pass a world that had only evil in it with no compassion, patience, courage, love, kindness, etc. to combat that evil. Indeed, we can find no reason for the existence of such a world. There would be no joy, no progress, no advancement towards a better way of life, and no hope for the individuals who lived on such a world. Simply put, if God brought about World II,

it would be difficult, if not impossible, to say that he is good or that he seeks that which is good for mankind. It seems reasonable to assume that for these reasons alone we can cross off World II as a possible world created by a loving God.

That said, the concepts of hell or outer darkness might actually be the closest thing to World II that we know of. Indeed, a world filled with evil, but lacking the opposing virtuous qualities to keep that evil in check would literally be a living hell for all those who dwell there.

### World I

This leaves us with World I, which is the world that best describes the world in which we live. LDS theology proclaims that, given the nature of eternal realities, and in order to promote the largest amount of good in the universe, God created World I. For Mormonism, then, World I not only represents our best possible hope for expressing God's love towards us, it represents our only logical conclusion given the realities of the universe and natural limitations of God.

In short, God seems to have but two choices. He can try to help the self-existent intelligences evolve and progress or he can simply do nothing and leave them as they are. As we have explained, in order to help them progress, they must have their agency or free will. If they have this agency, then evil will exist. And since evil naturally exists in the universe, it becomes vital that we learn how to counteract and combat evil by developing the qualities of compassion, patience, love, mercy, hope, etc. as found in the core teachings of almost all major religions. This is how God became a God. He progressed in the midst of evil. He became the being he is by learning how to deal with evil – by incorporating the very principles of goodness that make the universe a worthwhile place in which to live. Without these principles of goodness, World II becomes a reality, not just in this world but throughout the universe, hence, the preaching of good and the creation of just rewards and punishments according to what each individual freely chooses. To a large extent, it is the very existence of evil that allows us to know the good from the evil and to experience the joy associated with choosing the good. As Elder Daniel H. Wells explains:

*Herein lies the great evidence of our lineage, of our having descended from the Gods, reasoning, intelligent beings possessing the capabilities of the Gods--that is, the power to rise to their capabilities, being of that nature and of that kind of which are the Gods. And I might say that a person who is not capable of being a peculiar agent of the devil need never aspire to become a son of God, for, according to the Scriptures, we are "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ; if it so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." If it would have been as well for us to have remained in our pre-existent state; if we could have learned and gained all of this experience, learned to know the good from the evil, the light from the darkness, do you suppose that our Father in heaven would have sent us forth into the world, subjected us to all these tests and trials and temptations of sin, of sorrow, of misery, sickness, pain and death? I don't.*

*To me this is a grand old world, and fulfills its destiny and purpose, the destiny and purpose of God our Heavenly Father, in bringing it forth and preparing it for the habitation of man, and bringing forth his children upon it. This world is not here by*

*mere accident, it is not here because it merely happened so; but it was made with a destiny and purpose which it is answering most superbly in my estimation. It gives the people an opportunity of obtaining tabernacles for their spirits to dwell in. This in and of itself is a great thing and a blessing, although some may act in such a manner that it would have been better for them, perhaps, never to have been born. Still it is a blessing to undergo tests, to pass through ordeals, to subject ourselves to the principles of truth and righteousness, rejecting the evil and receiving the good. Why, on natural principles a course of that kind is just as sure to exalt us in the scale of human existence and in the scale of future and eternal existence, as it is that we have an existence at all; whereas a course the reverse to purity, the ordinary course of sin and iniquity and transgression against the laws of God, is sure to debase, degrade, and to lead down to misery, sorrow and death. It is as natural as anything else--as natural as that we exist. These things bring their own rewards and their own punishments naturally. Can a person avoid punishment? Yes. How? By receiving and obeying the principles of the Gospel and getting forgiveness of his sins, follies, weaknesses, imperfections, and wrong-doings, we can repent and turn away from the evil and do that which is good from henceforth, and the Lord will forgive us. (Journal of Discourses, Vol.24, p.317)*

It should be recognized that the Lord is not a silent partner in all of this. In other words, it is not the case that God merely sits back and watches, hoping that his children will learn and incorporate the good qualities that bring eternal life and eternal joy. God, himself, brings to pass many learning experiences for us that help us to progress. Just as a loving parent will often discipline a child or allow them to experience frustrations in order to learn the lessons of life, so also will God use similar methods to correct our course or help us in our journey. Not all of these course corrections are pleasant or completely understood by us. People do not always learn on their own. In fact, we seldom seem to learn very much on our own. Hence, God intervenes, often in fairly unpleasant ways. In this sense, God is an instigator of what most people would consider evil. Given the eternal nature of man, this is necessary in order to bring about a greater good.

*Yea, and we may see at the very time when he [God] doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One--yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.*

*And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him.*

*O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world!*

*Yea, how quick to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom's paths!*

*Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide.  
(Helaman 12:2-6)*

Indeed, in order for us to bring to pass the very purposes of our existence, in order to experience the joy and happiness which God has designed for us to receive and which we ourselves desire to receive, God must often not only allow evil to exist, but he must also promote it to some extent. This, again, is due to the very nature of the universe. There simply is no other choice. It is important to note that it is the agency of man that brings to pass this necessity. As the prophet Alma explains, it would be better if we didn't have to be encouraged or compelled to learn the lessons of the universe, but if we won't learn them for ourselves, then it is better that we are encouraged to do so.

*And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved.*

*And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word?*

*Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed--yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty.*

*Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe. (Alma 32:13-16)*

This is the true nature of our relationship with God. He has created a world that provides the best possible circumstances for our progress and learning. This, of necessity, includes the presence of evil, both moral and natural. Through this personal experience with evil we learn how to overcome it and create a society of beings who choose only that which is good and wholesome. This society has been referred to within Mormonism as Zion or the Celestial Kingdom. Both Zion and the Celestial Kingdom represent the closest thing to World III that this universe has to offer – a world that eliminates evil by emphasizing and incorporating good principles.

So long as God continues to love us enough to help us evolve and progress out of our natural state as basic intelligences, evil will continue to exist in the universe. The Celestial Kingdom and Zion are those pockets within the universe in which intelligent beings have learned to overcome evil themselves and have made a conscious decision to help others to do the same. It is my hope that all people will learn the lessons of God, which are simply the lessons of life in the universe, and become a partner with God by helping others to learn these lessons as well. It is only by taking this approach that evil has any chance of being controlled or eliminated in any way. In order to eliminate evil we must face it head on and learn to overcome it, first within ourselves and then within others.

Although the LDS view of the problem of evil still leaves us with many questions, it is clear that it far surpasses the view held by traditional Judeo-Christian theology, as fashioned and advanced by the great western theologians.

### **Divine Foreknowledge And Human Free Will**

The problem of divine foreknowledge and human free will can be somewhat of a touchy subject for many people. It provides a logical paradox that is difficult to overcome. As with the problem of evil, LDS theology deals with this paradox much more elegantly and reasonably than does traditional theology. However, as we shall see, there are still many questions to answer, even within Mormonism.

There are at least two key areas that serve as the crux of the LDS view of this problem:

1. That because God may not be omniscient in the traditional sense and is, in all likelihood, still progressing in knowledge, human free will remains in tact. If God does not know what I will choose in the future, then there is no logical contradiction, as explained in earlier sections. This includes the concept that God obeys the laws of time and space and, hence, is “inside of time” and experiences time as a constant change from past to future, just as we do. This view of God rejects the notion that God knows everything we will choose in the future. It allows God to be extremely knowledgeable or as omniscient as is logically and naturally possible, but also allows for our individual agency to exist to a large extent.
2. That there are still prophesies or divine predictions of future events that seem to make up a large part of the LDS system of belief. We are left with the question of how God can accurately predict future events with such precision.

We will deal with each of these issues in turn.

#### *How Is Mankind Free to Choose for Themselves?*

Clearly the crux of this issue revolves around the concept of God as a being that knows all future events. Simply stated, if God knows everything I will do in the future, then I have no choice but to do what God knows. The most prominent LDS view of God seems to be that of a being who exists in time and who has access to all the knowledge of all the known beings in the universe

but who is still progressing in knowledge. For all intents and purposes, this simply defeats the argument from the onset. This leaves the door wide open as to the future choices of mankind. If there is no such thing as divine foreknowledge, then there is no conflict with human free will.

This solution tends to leave a bad taste in the mouths of many people. In some sense, we are all similar to the great theologians in this regard. We tend to want a God who knows all things. For some reason we seem to find it difficult to have faith in a God who may still be learning or who may not be in absolute control of all future events. Yet, we want to be free as well. The problem is that we simply can't have it both ways. Elder Bruce R. McConkie once expressed the following concerns about a God who may not be completely omniscient in all things:

*Will he [God] one day learn something that will destroy the plan of salvation and turn man and the universe into an uncreated nothingness? Will he discover a better plan of salvation than the one he has already given to men in worlds without number? ...If God is just dabbling with a few truths he has already chanced to learn or experimenting with a few facts he has already discovered, we have no idea as to the real end and purpose of creation. (The Seven Deadly Heresies, fireside address, Marriott Center at Brigham Young University, 1 June 1980)*

For some reason, most people seem to want God to be absolute in all ways. At even the slightest hint of something less than this, we begin to falter and lose faith. Regardless of how much God may know, most people tend to accept nothing less than complete and unqualified omniscience as an attribute of deity. Anything less and we start looking for the exits of the church. However extreme this view may be, it is nonetheless more or less descriptive of the reality of mankind.

The point that we should perhaps consider more than any other is that it doesn't matter what we want God to be concerning this issue. We do not define the reality of God. This seems to be the approach taken by the great theologians in the first place. God is what he is. Our job is one of discovery, not creation. It only matters what God really is. Then, and only then, can we begin to relate to him and commence our journey to become more like him.

Even with the harshest of possibilities before us, why would we not put our faith in a being that knows all within his vast domain and has access to all the knowledge of all the gods who have ever gone before him? It is easy to see how the simple faith that a child expresses in his loving parents can be much greater than the faith an adult has in the God of many worlds.

From a purely logical standpoint, the options before us are fairly simple. We can believe that God possesses absolute foreknowledge of all future events, or we can believe that we have free agency and are, therefore, accountable for our actions. However, it would be difficult to conceive of a view that would allow us to have it both ways. Given the information we have from LDS theology concerning how God is omniscient, combined with the fact that all of western religion is based on the notion of agency and accountability, it would seem that the most reasonable conclusion is to admit that God probably doesn't know all of our actions before we make them. God does not possess absolute foreknowledge. Hence, we are free to make our own choices and be truly accountable for our actions.

### The “Foreknowledge” of God

Although this conclusion concerning God’s lack of foreknowledge may seem disconcerting to some, it need not necessarily be so. Even though God may be progressing in knowledge it would be a great mistake to view him as anything other than the vastly superior being that he is. When compared to our knowledge, God might as well be omniscient in the literal sense. In addition, it seems clear that God is still able to predict many future events with great accuracy. One such example comes from the Book of Mormon when the Lord shows the circumstances surrounding Christ’s birth to Nephi in a vision almost 600 years before it actually occurred.

*And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look! And I looked as if to look upon him, and I saw him not; for he had gone from before my presence.*

*And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. (1 Nephi 11:12-13)*

The problems of divine foreknowledge prompt several important questions concerning such visions. Did Nephi actually see these events in the future or did he merely see a representation of what they would likely look like in the future? Again, if nothing exists outside of time, then we must conclude that neither the city of Nazareth nor the Virgin Mary could be viewed in a future state. Mary did not yet exist in her mortal probation and the place seen by Nephi would certainly undergo many unpredictable changes before the coming of Christ. Yet, Nephi apparently saw something that was both clear enough to explain and reliable enough to predict with relative accuracy. How is this done?

Given our discussion about the nature of time, it is reasonable to assume that the events seen by Nephi were not the actual events surrounding the Savior’s birth. Simply put, those events had not yet occurred and thus were not yet available to be seen by Nephi. It seems more reasonable to assume that the Lord was somehow showing Nephi a simulation of what God would somehow cause to come to pass in the future. Again, we must understand that if Nephi saw the actual event, rather than merely a depiction of that event, then the law of time must have been compromised and with it the freedom of all mankind. For if Nephi saw the actual event itself, then in a very real sense it had already happened and simply could not happen otherwise. It would then be reasonable to assume that Nephi could look into the future regarding any other issues as well with similar results. He could see who went to heaven and who went to hell. He could see himself either being crowned as a God or falling like King David and there would be nothing he could do to change any portion of it. If future events themselves can be seen, then it follows that we have no choice but to fulfill those future events.

One possible solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge and human free will is that the foreknowledge of God does not consist of knowing the choices his children will make, rather it lies in his ability to know all of the possible choices we might make and either acting or reacting accordingly to bring about his purposes. It is certainly conceivable that God knows every possible choice each of us can make in this life. Each person in this life is placed here in a

specific time and place and under specific circumstances. Hence, we have only a finite set of choices available to us. If God knows what each of those choices are, it is reasonable to assume that he could plan accordingly so that no matter what we choose, his purposes will still be accomplished.

It is also conceivable that He knows each of us so well that he can predict many of our tendencies with great accuracy, similar to that of a parent being able to predict what each of her children might do in certain circumstances, only to a vastly greater degree. With this knowledge of both circumstances and the natural tendencies of people, combined with his power to control circumstances, God could “easily” make plans and predict outcomes with incredible precision without completely taking away our moral agency.

Suppose, for example, we compare this life to playing a game of chess. If I were to play a game of chess with God we could safely say that he would accomplish his purposes for playing the game. He could even devise a way to predict and tell me the outcome of the game before it ever happened. This does not necessitate that He knows my choices before I make them. Nor does it imply that He actually sees the future in some way. Given the rules and limitations involved with the game of chess, it could simply be the case that He knows all of the possible choices available to me and he understands perfectly what should be done in every possible situation. Due to his vastly superior intellect, he has already made a contingency plan for every possible choice I will make during the entire game. The end result is that God will check mate my king and that he even might be able to tell me which pieces he will use to perform the act and where my king will be situated at the time. All of this is very conceivable given the differences in perspective and abilities of each player. Could not the same be basically true of life itself?

If we compare our game of chess to life here on earth, we find many similarities. We all have a finite set of choices we can make in this life. Though they may seem infinite to us, they really are not infinite at all. One big difference between our game of chess and life itself is that God makes up many of the rules to the game of life. He decides where I will play, when I will play, and under what circumstances I will play. Because of this, it is relatively easy to understand how God could know our possible choices in every detail. For every choice we make, God knows the outcome of that choice. Because He knows all of the possibilities and all of the results, He can act or react accordingly in order to accomplish his purposes. A person here on earth may think he can fool God or thwart his plans, but in reality his choices will have already been taken into account. And though a choice may not have been “known” by God, the possibility of that choice has already been planned for and the appropriate action will be taken to insure the final outcome.

If God knows all of the possibilities of life and how to deal with each of them in order to accomplish his purposes, then it is safe to assume that his purposes will still be accomplished. My agency will still exist but my chances of thwarting God’s purposes in the game of life are still nil. Every action that I freely choose will be countered with a well-planned reaction that will eventually lead us toward the final (and inevitable) outcome of the game. In this manner, even though the route I take may not be set or completely predictable, the outcome of the game is set and absolutely predictable. God’s purposes are accomplished, his prophesies fulfilled, and my agency is still in tact.

In this way we can begin to better understand some of the apparently extreme actions God has had to take in order to bring about his purposes. For example, the entire story of Nephi obtaining the brass plates might be better understood in this light. If things aren't going the way they should, the Lord is not above telling his servants to kill a man for the greater good, lie to his servant, steal his property, and kidnap a person. One might ask, "Why was all this necessary?" Surely there was a better way for God to lead circumstances so as to bring about his purposes. Yet, there are many such events in the scriptures that would seem to follow this pattern. Is it too inconceivable a notion to suggest that God has to make a "course correction" from time to time due to the free choices of mankind? Would it be much different than saying, "I was hoping that you wouldn't make that move. Now I'm going to have to take your queen first and change the nature of the game a little from what I was hoping. Nevertheless, the game will still end as I predicted it will."

In the end at least two things are clear. The first is that it is unlikely that God possesses absolute foreknowledge. The second is that even though we are free to make our own choices, we are likely not as free as we would like to be. We are limited by many circumstances, including our own disposition and tendencies. We are also limited due to the actions of God in order to bring about his eternal purposes. It is virtually inconceivable that we will thwart his plans and the final outcome of this life.

As for our fears surrounding the idea that God may someday learn something in the far reaches of an endless universe that will somehow thwart his plans, perhaps we will simply have to wait and see. Yet, it would be foolish indeed if we chose to neglect or ignore such a being merely because He is still learning. It is reasonable to assume that comparing our intellect with God's is at least similar in scope to comparing the intellect of a dog with our own. The concern here is that the dog is closer to us in intellect than we are to God. As Elder B. H. Roberts said,

*...is it too bold a thought, that with this progress, even for the Mightiest, new thoughts, and new vistas may appear, inviting to new adventures and enterprises that will yield new experiences, advancement, and enlargement even for the Most High? It ought to be constantly remembered that terms absolute to man may be relative terms to God, so far above our thinking is his thinking; and his ways above our ways. (Seventy's Course in Theology, "The Atonement," pp. 69-70)*

It is true that we may have to live with the "new adventures and enterprises" God may someday encounter. However, we ought to be careful not to let the boldness of the concept, or the pride of our own selfish interests, allow us to see God as anything other than the amazingly exalted being that he is. To give Him anything less than our full faith and adoration would seem to be an extremely irrational choice on our part. Yet, since we are free to choose for ourselves, there will undoubtedly be a wide variety of views concerning this matter. This is as it should be. And all will still be well in the end.

### **The Significance of God**

When compared to the God of traditional theology, as created by the great western theologians, it should be apparent that the God of Mormonism is a god we can more fully understand,

appreciate, and eventually come to know as a real being in the universe. It is a being that makes sense to our natural understanding of things. He has a physical presence in both time and space. He is not the sole creator of all the evil in the world. His existence doesn't negate our free will or moral agency. He is the great defender of free will and moral agency. He is literally a father and a parent to us, having experienced for himself the process and growth that we are currently experiencing. He promotes as much good in the universe as he possibly can, given the logical and natural restrictions of that universe. He not only acts on behalf of our welfare and the greater good, but he also reacts to our situations and circumstances. He hears and answers our prayers. Like us, He has always existed in one form or another, but has been progressing from one stage of existence to another and continues to do so. He is a being that is much more like us, and we like him, than most people can imagine. And yet, He is so far beyond us in his eternal progression as to deserve our allegiance with unwavering faith. He is the giver of spiritual knowledge. He is the teacher of correct moral principles that naturally lead to happiness and a better, more fulfilling way of life for all who would follow him. He is the rewarder of justice and the giver of mercy. He is the great judge who saves us by his grace after all we can do. He conforms to eternal law perfectly. He is our God and eternal Father in heaven.

Understanding this God, his nature, attributes and characteristics enables us to understand ourselves to a much greater extent. We can now better understand our relationship to God, why he came into our lives to begin with, and how he's trying to help us and why. We can also more fully understand the world in which we live and why it was created or organized in the manner that it was. We can better understand our own future and appreciate that we are responsible for our future to a large extent. We can better understand other people and why there are good people and bad people and everything in between. We can begin to understand our own progression as a person and as a self-existent, eternal child of God. We understand that this earth life is but a brief moment within an eternal lifespan for each of us, that our lives existed forever before we were born and that they will continue to exist forever after we die. We understand that there is no such thing as ceasing to exist in one form or another. Eternity becomes a real and meaningful issue for us.

The list of significant issues that come from a proper understanding of God and our relationship to him is almost endless. Now we can better understand the words of Joseph Smith when he said,

*I am going to inquire after God because I want you all to know God and be familiar with him. If I can get you to know Him, I can bring you unto him.*

*If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves...It is necessary we should understand the character and being of God and how he became God...The first principle of the gospel is to know for a certainty the character of God, and that we may converse with him. (The King Follett Discourse)*

It should be mentioned that even though LDS theology provides a much better concept of God than does traditional western theology, there are still many questions to answer. Simply because the LDS view of God is more refined and logical than the view of traditional religion doesn't mean that LDS theology has all the answers or that there isn't much more to learn about God. In

many key areas we still have far to go and look forward to a time when God sees fit to reveal more about himself and his plan.

For example, one of the most difficult aspects of knowing God and following the prophets' teachings concerning him deals with the concept of conversing directly with God. For Joseph Smith, the ability to know God for ourselves and to converse with him directly was considered to be the "first principle" of the gospel. Yet, in our attempts to communicate "with" God, as opposed to only communicating "to" him, most people tend to run into considerable difficulty. Not only is it often a challenge to receive clear answers directly from God, it is often difficult to even discern what is an answer from God and what is not.

Mormonism places a very high value on obtaining information from God. Relatively speaking, Mormonism professes to have much more information from God than any other western religion. In addition to the Bible as recognized holy writ, Mormonism has the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. It also holds firmly to a belief in further revelation and inspiration from God to man in several different forms, the most significant of which is clearly that of personal revelation. The prophet Joseph Smith continually counseled his followers to create a communication path directly between themselves and God. For example, he once taught that,

*The best way to obtain truth and wisdom is not to ask it from books, but to go to God in prayer, and obtain divine teaching. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Pg.190)*

And again,

*Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach him, and how to ask so as to receive an answer. When we understand the character of God, and how to come to him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.349)*

President Brigham Young was perhaps even more forceful in his efforts to get people to obtain information directly from God.

*Were I to draw a distinction in all the duties that are required of the children of men, from first to last, I would place first and foremost the duty of seeking unto the Lord our God until we open the path of communication from heaven to earth--from God to our own souls...it is the only thing that can lead the people to a true knowledge of the reality of facts as they exist. (Journal of Discourses, 8:339)*

As a result of the LDS emphasis on receiving personal revelation, many people have claimed spiritual experiences and answers to their sincere prayers. Yet, it must be conceded that the receiving of personal revelation is not an exact science. For most people, obtaining and verifying personal revelation is a fairly difficult task. The question that should come to everyone's mind is why God has chosen to make it so difficult to know him and understand his will. Even with all of the added helps that Mormonism has to offer, seeking and finding God in

a verifiable, conclusive manner is more difficult than we would usually like it to be. Clearly there is evidence and support for religious claims. However, it is reasonable to assume that God could provide us with a great deal more evidence and support for spiritual teachings, should he choose to do so. For example, why does He allow so much religious confusion to take place in the world rather than sending forth his angels to correct us when we misunderstand? Why does He allow two armies to go into battle, each claiming that God is on their side? It is reasonable to assume that God could make known to one side or both that he is not supporting their effort and opposes their cause absolutely. Yet, for whatever reason, God seems to hold back from such interference, thus letting us try to figure out a great deal on our own or follow our own vain ambitions to the grave rather than intervene. These instances are common and tend to confuse and complicate the issues surrounding God and religion.

For whatever reason, the Lord has clearly not given us massive amounts of evidence when it comes to verifying religious claims. This creates a difficult problem for many who would like solid, verifiable evidence for religious claims. Again, it is reasonable to assume that God could provide this kind of verification if he wanted to. Yet, as much as we seek for philosophical or scientific evidence to support our religious beliefs, for the most part these confirmations simply aren't there. Interestingly enough, this seems to be true of all religions, not just Mormonism. The question that haunts many people is, "Why would the Lord not provide us with more empirical or practical evidence of spiritual truths?" If His goal is to teach and convert us, why not send more angels or provide more archeological evidence or whatever to promote a higher degree of knowledge and faith? The only answer we appear to find is that it seems to be by design that God wants us to dwell in the realm of faith and uncertainty. It seems clear that God doesn't want us to have that kind of evidence to support our faith. This was implied in the answer God gave to Moses when he asked why we are here on earth.

*And he [Moses] beheld many lands; and each land was called earth, and there were inhabitants on the face thereof.*

*And it came to pass that Moses called upon God, saying: Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them?*

*And behold, the glory of the Lord was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God, and talked with him face to face. And the Lord God said unto Moses: For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me. (Moses 1:29-31, underline added)*

Along these same lines, Joseph Smith once said,

*The design of the great God in sending us into this world, and organizing us to prepare us for the eternal worlds, I shall keep in my own bosom at present. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.306)*

But why wouldn't God want us to know such things? Why wouldn't He want us to have more evidence to either confirm or refute our spiritual or religious beliefs? Why would He purposely withhold validating information from us? One possible answer is that He doesn't merely want to

convert us. He doesn't want us to simply use self-discipline to obey his commandments or force them upon others. Mere conversion alone may actually be a secondary goal of all He has created and revealed. Rather, perhaps God wants to see how we will react to spiritual truths when left almost entirely unto themselves. In other words, perhaps He wants to see what we naturally desire – what is naturally in our hearts to pursue. Since the gospel is largely concerned with moral principles of conduct rather than physical principles of nature, this earth life may be little more than a test to see what we honestly desire in our heart of hearts. This would also explain the need to forget our previous existence. If we strip away all previous knowledge and provide little verifiable evidence to support our conclusions, we are mostly left with our character and the natural desires of our heart to motivate and steer us down our spiritual or moral paths. It is this test of character or “heart” that separates the truly righteous from the hypocritical wicked, regardless of their ecclesiastical positions or perfectly disciplined morality. It is also this test of character that largely qualifies one to become a god in the first place. As President Spencer W. Kimball explained,

*Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most truly vital is the knowledge of God, of his existence, his powers, his love, and his promises. Through this knowledge, we can learn that our great objective in life is to build character. In fact we learn that the building of faith and character is paramount, for character is higher than intellect, and perfect character will continually be rewarded with increased intellect. Thus our real business on earth is to master self. And as we master ourselves, we will learn to master the earth and it's elements...And let us remember that it is not so much what we know that is important, as what we do and what we are. The master's plan is a program of doing, of living, not merely knowing. Knowledge itself is not the end. It is how we righteously live and apply that knowledge in our lives and how we apply it to help others that describes our character. (Ensign, Seek Learning Even by Study and also by Faith, September 1983)*

If there is just enough evidence to present the principles of righteousness without “proving” their truthfulness, then a genuine test is created. On the other hand, if we had sufficient evidence to “absolutely verify” these spiritual teachings, it is reasonable to assume that many people would obey them and/or force them upon others in very unnatural ways. This seems to have been the “disease” of the Pharisees, for example. They cared more about who was right than they did about what was right. They loved religion more than they loved righteousness. If God were to provide more evidence to verify spiritual truths, it is reasonable to believe that this problem would only be enhanced. Yet, as it is now, those who gain a testimony of spiritual truths must generally do so based on their natural love and desire for those principles themselves instead of any other external evidence. In other words, their faith, hope, and knowledge must be placed in the principles of love, patience, knowledge, virtue, etc. and not in some scientific discovery that supports the truthfulness of the Bible or Book of Mormon.

It's not that such discoveries are bad, in and of themselves. It's just that they are not what the gospel is all about or how the Lord apparently wants us to experience and learn spiritual truths. The gospel is all about character and moral principles. It is about unselfishly assessing and changing our hearts and minds so that we can actually become a certain kind of being. In the

end, there can be no faking or “forced righteousness.” In fact, there is no such thing as forced righteousness. It is a contradiction in terms. If a worthwhile and sincere experiment is to be undertaken regarding the testimonies given to us in the scriptures, it will, of necessity, be based on our own honest desires to verify and pursue the spiritual principles discussed within those pages. Any other motivation than this will likely yield poor, hypocritical results. In addition, anyone whose testimony is based on anything other than righteous, moral principles will either be in it to gain power or to satisfy some personal insecurity or need to be right. Sooner or later this type of person will either become a thorn in the side of true righteousness or simply fall by the wayside due to lack of evidence that “makes them right” or puts them on the “winning team.” They have no true love for the principles of righteousness, and hence, no sincere place among those who do.

This places each of us in a particularly difficult position as we search for God and try to build a meaningful relationship with him. The fact that this is a difficult road to travel seems to be by design. It also seems to be by design that this is largely an individual task. It is true that others can and do help us a great deal by teaching, bearing testimony of their own experiences, and encouraging us to experiment on our own, much as Alma did with the Zoramites,<sup>12</sup> but it seems to be by design that we must put things to the test ourselves before we can begin to understand God and his dealings with us. As Joseph Smith has stated,

*Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Pg.324, underline added)*

This, then, becomes perhaps our greatest challenge within religion or spirituality. We must try to come to know God in both of the ways previously discussed. Although knowing God’s attributes is a significant step in the right direction, somehow we must come to know God in a more personal manner as a father, a person, and eventually a friend. I would suggest that this is impossible to do from a distance. We must be able to see Him and commune with him face to face, just as one man communes with another here on earth. Somehow we must break through the veil and actually meet God. Getting us to a point in which we can each personally meet and commune directly with God seems to be the ultimate goal of Mormonism. This, in turn, leads us to eternal life and lasting joy.

Due to a greater amount of information given to us via ancient and modern revelation, Mormonism clearly stands head and shoulders above all other western religions, both in quantity and quality of spiritual content. LDS theology shows us many ways that God can become more significant and meaningful to us in our everyday lives. However, unless Mormonism is helping us to not only know God’s attributes, but also to know him on a personal level, then we are likely missing out on the true significance of LDS theology and perhaps religion in general. This

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<sup>12</sup> Alma 32

search for the significance of God in our lives seems to be a personal search, and not an easy or obvious one at all. It seems to be set up this way by design, hence the need for faith and honest desires of the heart. Without these tools, any person will have difficulty seeing the significance and meaningfulness of God in their life. I have no doubt that someday we will see the whole picture and slap our heads exclaiming, “Now I understand why God set it up this way! It makes perfect sense.” In the meantime, we must use all that God has given us to learn and understand as much as we can about him. This includes using all of the additional tools provided to us through Joseph Smith. In this manner God becomes much more significant and meaningful to each person who honestly seeks spiritual guidance.

### **Why Worship God?**

I once had a class in college in which the instructor said something to the effect of, “The only reason we worship Christ is because he is Christ.” This seemed a bit odd to me. So I asked the teacher, “Why not worship Satan then, instead of Christ? Is there no other reason to worship a being other than the fact that he is in charge or carries a certain title?” It doesn’t make much sense to worship a being for completely arbitrary reasons or simply because that being is on the “winning side.” What is the difference between Christ and Satan that would make one worthy of our worship and the other not?

Within LDS theology we find that God had to progress to a godly state by conforming to the self-existent rules of good and evil in the universe. In this sense, it is clear that God did not create the eternal principles of right and wrong. He merely obeys them. He is currently engaged in an activity to help us travel down this same path by helping us to learn and conform to these same eternal rules of good and evil. If we are honestly interested in doing good by living and promoting ethical, wholesome principles, then this scenario tends to place us in a partnership with God. Just like our earthly parents, but to a much greater extent, God has experienced a lot of life and has advanced to a level that entitles him to help others grow and learn from his experience. We should ask ourselves how interested we are in learning the eternal rules of the universe. If we are not interested in such things as right and wrong, eternal joy or sorrow, then God tends to have much less significance for us. If, however, these principles are of genuine interest to us and we can honestly say that we seek, love, and enjoy good, wholesome, exalting, moral principles calculated to bring lasting joy and happiness, then God becomes the most important being there is in our efforts to accomplish these goals. He is the great example and teacher of all things moral and correct. As President Brigham Young once explained,

*I do not love, serve or fear the Lord for the sake of getting rid of being damned, nor for the sake of getting some great gift or blessing in eternity, but purely because the principles which God has revealed for the salvation of the inhabitants of the earth are pure, holy and exalting in their nature. In them there is honor and eternal increase, they lead on from light to light, strength to strength, glory to glory, knowledge to knowledge, and power to power; and the opposite reduces any individual or any nation on the earth to imbecility, ignorance, slothfulness, and to the loathsome state of degradation in which we see some of the inhabitants of the earth now. It is purely for the love of holy principles, that will exalt the people, that we may receive and gain more and more, and*

*keep receiving for ever and ever, that I serve the Lord, and try to build up his kingdom.  
(Journal of Discourses 16:69-70)*

It is important for us to understand that the reason we worship God is not merely because he is all-powerful or because he holds a specific title. We worship God and Christ because they represent the embodiment of all good and wholesome principles that bring lasting joy and happiness. We honor them because they love us and are working to exalt us. The difference between God and Satan seems to be associated with the desires of their heart and their conformance to righteous, unselfish principles. God represents the ultimate in love, mercy, kindness, knowledge, wisdom, patience, long-suffering, humility, compassion, and all other qualities that eliminate evil and promote the greatest amount of good in the form of lasting joy and happiness for all people, not just for themselves. This is why we worship God and why we must learn to know, listen to, and follow him. God far surpasses any mortal being in all of these qualities and should, therefore, be the focus of all our efforts to learn, progress, and find the lasting joy that is the very goal of our existence.

The reason for pursuing and worshipping God is that he is our great parent and teacher of all that is good and right. He actually knows what the eternal rules for happiness are, much more than we. Therefore, as a child looks towards his more experienced parents for earthly training, so much more so should we look towards God for our eternal training.

## **Summary**

As a summary to the LDS concept of God, let's take the same hypothetical situation we used previously in the summary of the God of modern Christianity or western theology in general. For the sake of argument, let's suppose that it is the next semester at the same university and with the same professor of philosophy. Only this time, instead of a Christian student from another, more mainstream denomination, the professor happens to pick on a knowledgeable Mormon. Using the same basic topics as before, the questioning of the professor may result in something similar to the following:

*"Let me explain the problem science has with Jesus Christ." The atheist professor of philosophy pauses before his class and then asks one of his new students to stand.*

*"You're a Christian, aren't you, son?"*

*"Yes, sir. I'm a Mormon and we believe in Jesus Christ."*

*"So you believe in God?"*

*"Absolutely."*

*"Is God good?"*

*"Sure! God's good."*

*"Is God all-powerful? Can God do anything?"*

*"Well, we believe that God can do anything that is consistent with other natural truths in the universe."*

*Surprised a little by this response, the professor considers the answer for moment.*

*"So you believe there are things that God cannot do?"*

*"I believe God must obey not only the laws of logic and reason, but I also believe there are other eternal laws that God himself must obey, natural laws that He did not create nor can he alter."*

*"So, you don't believe that God controls everything in the universe absolutely?"*

*"I believe that God controls all of those things in the universe that are able to be controlled, sir. That includes more than I can imagine, but does not include everything."*

*"Interesting. Well, be that as it may, here's one for you. Let's say there's a sick person over here, and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help them? Would you try?"*

*"Yes sir, I believe I would."*

*"You would help a sick and maimed person if you could...in fact most of us would if we could... God doesn't."*

*"Excuse me, sir, I'll agree that God doesn't seem to help every sick person in the world, but how do you know God has never helped any sick people before? Can you prove that He has not?"*

*A little frustrated at being questioned in this manner, the professor responds, "He doesn't heal the sick, does he? My brother was a Christian who died of cancer even though he prayed to Jesus to heal him. How is this Jesus good? Hmmm? Can you answer that one?"*

*"Well, sir, I'm sorry to hear about your brother. However, my sister was supposed to die shortly after birth due to complications. The doctors said she was going to die. Yet, I watched my father give her a priesthood blessing and shortly thereafter she regained full health. To this day the doctors say she should be dead. I wish I could tell you why God let your brother die and saved my sister. My only guess is that either God could not save your brother due to some eternal principle, or that by letting him die some greater good was served. Would you agree that in some cases in life, a greater good is performed due to the suffering of some?"*

*"Well, yes, but it's different with God. God should be able to prevent all evil absolutely."*

*"Why do you believe that, sir? Did God tell you that himself, or are you basing that assumption more or less on the beliefs of the great theologians who told you what they thought God should be like?"*

*Pondering both the audacity of the student as well as the origin of the concept of God itself, the professor responds, "This is the belief of all major western religions, son. Are you saying that you know more about God than all of the great western theologians?"*

*"I'm merely saying that there are other views that perhaps deserve attention, sir. Views that allow for greater things to be accomplished by the suffering of some."*

*"That's ridiculous. What greater good could possibly come from my brother dying?"*

*"Well, do you have children, sir?"*

*"Yes I do. Why?"*

*"Do you ever give them medicine to help them?"*

*"Of course."*

*"Do they like the medicine?"*

*"Usually not."*

*"Would they take it if you didn't insist?"*

*"No."*

*“Then why do you insist on giving something to them that they don’t like or want to have? Why do you make them suffer so?”*

*“Because they don’t understand and I know that a greater good will be accomplished by something that seems bad to them.”*

*“Were you the same way when you were a child?”*

*“I believe so.” The wise professor sees immediately where this is leading.*

*“Do you suppose it is possible that a God who is not omnipotent in the traditional sense and therefore cannot prevent all evil absolutely, probably still knows more than you and I do about life and, therefore knows what’s good for us, even if we don’t always understand or particularly like it very much? Would that sound reasonable to you?”*

*“Well, under your definition of God so far, I suppose that might make sense.”*

*The elderly man is puzzled and squints his eyes slightly at the young man before him. He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give himself time to prepare his next series of questions. This was the first time in any of his philosophy classes that he had heard such responses.*

*“Let’s start again, young fella. Is God good?”*

*“Yes. I believe He is.”*

*“Is Satan good?”*

*“No.”*

*“Where does Satan come from?”*

*Without hesitation the student responds, “LDS theology teaches that Satan has always existed in one form or another and that he was not created or made, neither indeed can be.”*

*“What? You don’t believe that God made Satan?” The elderly man runs his bony fingers through his thinning hair and nervously turns to the smirking, student audience.*

*“That’s correct, sir. Mormons espouse the doctrine that all intelligent beings are eternal, meaning they were never created from nothing, but have always existed in one form or another.”*

*“So God didn’t create us from nothing? I suppose this means that He didn’t create Hitler or Jack the Ripper either.”*

*“That’s right, sir. Everyone comes into this world as a package deal, so to speak. God’s job is merely to help us to become as good and perfect as we can become, given the eternal nature of our pre-existing spirits and the natural laws of the universe.”*

*The professor is again surprised by what he hears. “I think we’re going to have a lot of fun this semester, ladies and gentlemen.” He turns back to the Mormon.*

*“Tell me, son. Is there evil in this world?”*

*“Yes, sir.”*

*“Evil’s everywhere, isn’t it? Did God make everything?”*

*“No, sir. He did not.”*

*“No? Then who created evil? Where did it come from?”*

*“Well, nobody and everybody. In other words, since all intelligent beings are eternal and had no beginning, and since those eternal beings each have their own unique character and free will, moral evil is created by each of us who don’t follow the principles of goodness.”*

*“Absolutely fascinating. I’ve never heard such responses in all my years of teaching.*

*But I’m still not convinced. What about evils that aren’t associated with morality or the*

*free will of man? For example, in addition to immorality, hatred, ugliness, and so forth, aren't there also sicknesses and famines and earthquakes and all manner of other natural evils? All the terrible things – do they exist in this world?"*

*The student shifts his feet. "Yes."*

*"Who created them?"*

*"I would have to say that God created, or rather organized from pre-existing matter, a world in which these types of evils exist."*

*The professor suddenly shouts at his student. "AH HAH! WHY WOULD HE DO THAT? TELL ME, PLEASE!"*

*"First let me say that I certainly don't have all the answers for every apparent evil that we encounter. Nobody does. However, as I mentioned before with the example about medicine, it is often necessary to experience evil before we can appreciate or even understand the good. Since God cannot prevent all evil in the universe, he must try to create the best possible world to teach us how to deal with evil and how to overcome it ourselves. Would you agree that the only way to learn about such good qualities as compassion, mercy, courage, patience, etc. is to be introduced to situations in which those qualities are required? In other words, can you learn about compassion if you never encounter an evil circumstance in which compassion is required?"*

*"I think I see your point," the elderly man says. "The only way we learn compassion is to encounter a situation that requires compassion? If evil didn't exist, it would be impossible to learn compassion."*

*The LDS student smiles slightly, "Exactly. I believe the purpose of this earth life is to teach us how to build moral character and become gods ourselves. In order to do that it is necessary to experience both the good things as well as the bad things. In fact, given the eternal nature of the universe, there is simply no way around it. Hence, evil actually becomes an important and necessary tool for helping us to become as good as we can possibly become. For example, tell me, sir, if all you ever experienced in life were good and only good, nothing challenging or bad whatsoever, how much do you think you would grow and progress? Remember that you have always existed – that God could not make you perfect to begin with. Under these conditions, would you ever be able to learn good from evil yourself or help other eternal beings learn good from evil, and become good themselves, if you had never experienced it for yourself?"*

*"Wait just a minute, young man. Are you suggesting that you believe you can become a god yourself?"*

*"I certainly am, sir. If God truly loves me and if God is the most perfect being in the universe, wouldn't He want me to become as good as he is? Would that not involve becoming just like him? Do you not want the best for your children as well? Why wouldn't a loving God want the best for us? What could be better than becoming a god? Does that not make sense to you, sir?"*

*"As a matter of fact, it does. But I have never heard of such a concept before. It sounds almost blasphemous somehow. I'll have to give it some thought."*

*The professor, now very fascinated by the discussion, but still determined to control the conversation, climbs into the Mormon's face. In a still small voice he says: "So, let me get this straight. You believe that God not only didn't create evil, but that he is in the business of trying to teach us, as pre-existing eternal beings, to become gods ourselves by*

*allowing us to confront evil ourselves and thus learn for ourselves the differences between good and evil. Is that basically what you're saying, son?"*

*"Yes, sir. That's basically it. That is the type of God I believe in and worship."*

*No answer. The professor tries to hold a steady, experienced gaze and fails. Suddenly he breaks away to pace the front of the classroom like an aging panther. The class is mesmerized.*

*"Tell me," the professor continues, "Under your definition of God, he is actually doing us a favor by allowing all the evil to exist in the world? Is that correct?"*

*The professor swishes his arms around to encompass the wickedness of the world.*

*"All the hatred, the brutality, all the pain, all the torture, all the death and ugliness and all the suffering was not created by this good God, but is instead being managed and used as a natural teaching tool to help us improve ourselves. Is that it, young man?"*

*"Yes, sir. That is what I believe. All the evil that exists in the world is either absolutely unpreventable by God or unpreventable without thereby eliminating some greater good."*

*"Absolutely fascinating...amazing doctrine." The professor leans into the student's face again and whispers, "I'm not done with you yet, boy?"*

*The Mormon swallows hard but gives no reply.*

*"Tell me young man, can you describe this God of yours?"*

*"Yes, I believe I can, sir?"*

*"Is this God everywhere? Does God fill the immensity of space?"*

*"I believe God has a physical body that can only be in one place and one time."*

*"WHAT!?! So now you're saying that God is not present everywhere? How does He know what's going on in the universe? Or do you even believe that He does know what's going in the universe?"*

*"Well, sir, I believe God is still progressing in knowledge and that He will continue to learn throughout eternity. I also believe that He knows what's going on within his vast kingdom in much the same way the President of the United States knows what's going on the United States, only to a much higher degree. I believe this is fairly easy to understand. Even with our relatively new technology and the help of other people, we have the ability to know much about our world, even without leaving our offices or homes. It is reasonable to assume that God has some pretty good technology himself and some pretty good people working for him. Wouldn't you think, sir?"*

*"I suppose so. So, you don't believe that all of God fills the immensity of space and yet is so small he can dwell in your heart?"*

*"No, sir. I cannot comprehend such a thing. Can you?"*

*"No, son, I cannot either."*

*"Do you believe that God dwells in your heart?"*

*"I believe his spirit or the Holy Ghost can dwell in my heart and that the presence or principles of God can dwell in my heart, but I do not believe that the physical body of God himself can dwell in my heart."*

*The professor again squints his eyes thoughtfully at the young student realizing that his normal line of questioning is being thwarted. The professor looks down at his shoe for a moment and then asks, "So tell me, you don't believe that God is completely omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and perfectly good?"*

*"Well, I believe God is perfectly good. And I believe God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent in ways that are consistent with other eternal realities. In other words,*

*even though God is still learning, he has access to all the knowledge available in the universe. In that sense, He is as omniscient as possible. I believe that via special devices and the help of angels and other beings God's presence is felt and represented throughout his vast kingdom. And I believe God can do anything that is logically and naturally possible to do, but that he must conform to other eternal realities that even he cannot change or destroy."*

*Walking back to the front of the class, the professor raises his voice noticeably. "This is unbelievable! Would I be correct in describing your God as just a very advanced man?"*

*"Yes, sir. Sometimes we refer to God as an exalted man."*

*"How did God become an exalted man?"*

*"The same way that you and I are, sir. He was once just like you and I, living on a mortal world and learning about good and evil in much the same manner that we are doing right now."*

*There is dead silence throughout the class as the professor glares at the student. "You mean to tell me that God wasn't always a God?"*

*"Yes, sir. We have a little saying we sometimes use that says as man now is, God once was and as God now is, man may become. Both God and man are self-existent, eternal realities that learn truth and goodness line upon line and precept upon precept."*

*Smiling a little, the professor calmly runs his hands through his hair. "I admit, as strange as your answers seem, your view of God seems to overcome many of the traditional arguments against the existence of a supreme being. How did you come to such a view of God? Does the Mormon church have scholars and theologians who sit around and figure these things out?"*

*"Well, I suppose we have all of those things in the LDS church. However, most of these doctrines we've discussed so far came as revelations to a man named Joseph Smith. We believe them because we believe that God told us these things himself, not because a group of men sat down and tried to define God according to their own desires."*

*"Oh yes, I've heard of this Joseph Smith. But I'm afraid I don't buy the revelation thing. He must have been a very learned man to come up with a view of God that so adequately explains away so many theological quandaries."*

*"Actually, I believe Joseph Smith had the equivalent of a third grade education, sir, and I'm not aware of very many direct quotes from Joseph Smith that dealt specifically with all of these philosophical arguments. Most of his teachings were applied to philosophy by others after his death."*

*"Be that as it may, I'm still skeptical. Can you tell me, for example, what God looks like? Have you ever seen him?"*

*"I cannot give specifics because I have not seen Him for myself, but I believe He looks similar to you and me in basic form."*

*"I thought not. Does God have any parts or components or pieces of any kind?"*

*"Yes, sir. He does. As I said earlier, he has a physical body similar to you and me."*

*"Does He have any form or mass of any kind?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"So He is made of physical matter?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

*"So, as I understand your beliefs, God has mass, body, components, pieces, and must be in one place at one time? Is that your position?"*

*The student pauses for a moment. "Yes, sir. God is a real being that we can touch and see and hear, just as you could touch and see and hear me in this room, should we be so fortunate to be allowed to do so."*

*"But you have never seen God. Correct?"*

*"That is correct sir. I have never seen God in this life."*

*One last round of questions and I'll let you alone. "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, son?"*

*The student straightens a bit. "Yes, professor. I do."*

*The old man shakes his head sadly. "Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen your Jesus?"*

*"No, sir. I've never seen Him."*

*"Then tell us if you've ever heard your Jesus?"*

*"No, sir. I have not."*

*"Have you ever felt your Jesus, tasted your Jesus or smelt your Jesus... In fact, do you have any sensory perception of your Jesus whatsoever?"*

*"No, sir, I'm afraid I haven't, at least not in the way you are describing."*

*"You're AFRAID... you haven't?"*

*"No, sir."*

*"Yet you still believe in him?"*

*"Most certainly, sir."*

*"That takes FAITH!" The professor smiles sagely at the underling. "According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn't exist. What do you say to that, son? Where is your God now?"*

*"May I ask you a few questions, sir?"*

*"Certainly. Just remember who is the professor and who is the student."*

*"Of course, sir. Do you believe Australia exists, sir?"*

*"Of course I do."*

*"Have you ever been to Australia, sir?"*

*"No I haven't, son."*

*"Then is it safe to say that you have never seen Australia, heard Australia, felt, tasted, or smelt Australia?"*

*The professor is now smiling noticeably. "No I have not, son."*

*"Then why do you believe that Australia exists?"*

*"That's easy, because there is so much testimony from others who have been there and because if I wanted to test it, I could go there myself and experience it first hand."*

*"So then, if I understand you correctly, we should use the testimonies and experiences of others as a foundation for some, if not many, of our beliefs? Would you accept that as a true statement, sir?"*

*"Yes, but I have many testimonies of Australia. You have only one of Jesus Christ - the Bible. And the events of the Bible are not able to be experienced first hand. That's all you have and it is weak, young man, very weak."*

*"Actually, sir, I have other testimonies as well. I have a volume called the Book of Mormon that tells of Christ visiting the American continent after his resurrection. I also have the recorded revelations of Joseph Smith, many of which are contained in a book called the Doctrine and Covenants. I also have another book we call the Pearl of Great Price which contains other revelations and experiences of various prophets. Would you*

*agree, sir, that if the testimony of others is of value, I have far more foundation for my beliefs in God and Christ than anyone who relies solely on the Bible?"*

*"Yes, that makes sense. But it is still only a few and you still lack the ability to put it to the test. Don't you?"*

*"Actually, sir, all of these scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, clearly teach that we should not rely only upon the testimonies of others for our knowledge of God. They teach that we should seek a personal experience for ourselves, just as you say. In fact, the Book of Mormon challenges its readers to seek a personal, spiritual experience for themselves that goes way beyond the mere testimonies found within the book itself. It is one of the major principles of Mormonism to have such an experience for yourself. The book actually warns against depending upon what it refers to as 'the arm of flesh,' or other people, for a knowledge of God."*

*"And tell me, son. Have you had such an experience for yourself?"*

*"Yes, sir, I have. It is quite a remarkable thing."*

*"And you're telling me I can also have a personal experience FOR MYSELF that is similar to the one you claim to have had? I don't have to merely depend upon the few testimonies of written scripture?"*

*"That's what the book says, sir. And that's what I believe to be true. However, just like getting on the jet and going to Australia, I'm afraid nobody else can take the journey for you. You must be willing to put it to the test for yourself."*

*"That sounds fair enough, I suppose," the professor responds, softly scratching his chin.*

*"Is there anything else you would like to ask me, sir?"*

*"This has been a most fascinating discussion, son - one that I will not soon forget. I've been teaching philosophy for many years and have never once come across such amazing beliefs as those you have espoused. Although you sound heretical by most standards, you have successfully frustrated every attempt I've made to show that God cannot exist and is little more than a meaningless mass of contradictions. I only have one more question for you, son. Would you mind spending some time with me this week to tell me more about this Joseph Smith and the spiritual experience you spoke of from the Book of Mormon?"*

*"It would be my pleasure, sir. May I sit down now?"*

*Confused about whether to feel pleased or frustrated, the professor smiles warmly. "Yes, sit down, please."*

*The Mormon sits...satisfied and strengthened in his own testimony of God, Christ, Joseph Smith, and Mormonism in general.*

Although this is merely a fictitious story, the point should be clear: The LDS view of God stands head and shoulders above the views held by traditional western theology. Although it surely doesn't answer all of our questions to the degree we would like, this concept of God makes far more sense and tends to overcome most of the major philosophical contradictions that have plagued western religion for many centuries. To some extent, the following thoughts explain well the distinction between LDS theology and that of the other major religions of western society:

*We have not yet succeeded in answering all of our questions. Indeed, we often feel that we have not completely answered any of them. The answers we have found only serve to raise a whole set of new questions. In some ways we feel we are as confused as ever.*

*But, we feel we are confused on a much higher level and about more important things.  
(Author unknown)*

Even though it is still incomplete in many respects, LDS theology is reasonable, practical theology. When compared to the concepts found in traditional Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, Mormonism provides much more breadth and depth of doctrine by far. It makes a great deal of sense and provides very good evidence that Joseph Smith was the true prophet of God he claimed to be.

## Conclusion

It is clear that there are significant differences between Mormonism and other western religions concerning the concept of deity. These differences are some of the most profound and significant points of LDS doctrine. When fully understood, the LDS view of God overcomes many of the apparent contradictions and confusion concerning the concept of God most commonly accepted throughout western theology, including the major religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

This document has only covered some of those differences as they relate to specific philosophical issues. Mormons and non-Mormons alike who are serious students of LDS theology should come to understand the LDS view of God, how it compares to the view of the great western theologians, what its strengths are compared to that view, and how it relates to each son or daughter of God as well as to the plan of salvation itself.

When all is said and done, the LDS concept of God is a testimony of the divine calling of Joseph Smith as a prophet of God. Whatever one may conclude about Mormonism in general, we must admit that Joseph Smith was an amazing individual. At the very least he was a great theologian and philosopher of religion, easily placed in the same category as any of the great theologians revered by other western religions. Yet, I contend that any knowledgeable and realistic student of Mormonism must also accept the possibility that Joseph Smith was far more than just another theologian expressing his opinions about God and the nature of the universe. We must accept not only the possibility but also the probability that he was a true prophet of God, that he didn't create this concept of deity merely from his own creative imagination. Rather, that he received it in the manner that he has told us he received it - directly from God.

*And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all which we give of him: That he lives!*

*For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father--*

*That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. (D&C 76:22-24)*

Should these simple statements be the case, that Joseph Smith actually saw God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, then the entire religious world has been turned upside down and we can

only conclude that the most significant religious event since perhaps the coming of Christ himself has been the restoration of the gospel through the prophet Joseph Smith.

### ***Personal Testimony Of The Author***

A testimony of spiritual or religious beliefs can be a complicated thing. Due to differing capacities and experiences among us, it can be quite different for different people. Yet, as I once wrote in one of my papers, I believe true faith, as spoken of in the scriptures, should always be based on some sort of support or evidence in order to draw a conclusion. To believe in something for no reason is to place your life in the hands of random chance. It is like trying to read an eye chart in a completely dark room. Your chances for success are extremely low, if there is any chance at all. This principle applies to spiritual truth as much as it does to any other kind of truth. We must find “substance” and “evidence”<sup>13</sup> to support our spiritual faith or it will be of little or no value to us. (See “Truth and People” p.7.)

With this in mind I’ve spent a great deal of time trying to pinpoint why I believe what I believe regarding the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith and Mormonism in general. As a result, I’ve categorized my reasons for belief into three major areas. These three areas are:

- 1) Spiritual Experiences,
- 2) Rational Explanations, and
- 3) Moral Principles.

These three areas combine to create the bulk of my testimony regarding Mormonism and the restored gospel. Each deserves some explanation and detail in order to be at least partially understood by those who have not personally experienced the same things I have had the privilege of experiencing.

#### **Spiritual Experiences**

My spiritual experiences have ranged from small, seemingly meaningless events to significantly deep and often profound incidents. One of the most significant and intense experiences occurred while reading the Book of Mormon in the Missionary Training Center prior to serving an LDS mission to Holland. During the two months I was there I woke up earlier than the other missionaries for the sole purpose of gaining the spiritual testimony of the Book of Mormon of which so many have spoken. I prayed as sincerely as I ever had up to that time in my life. The result was an experience that was more powerful than my words will be able to communicate. The book came alive to me. Tears became common, even while reading portions that few people would consider terribly spiritual or emotional. Both my mind and my “heart” were affected by this experience, which lingered throughout my reading of the book. In fact, this experience had such a powerful effect on my mind that by the time I had finished reading the book this one time, I was able to ask others to begin reading anywhere in the book and I could tell them within a few chapters where they were reading. Regardless of what the Book of Mormon may or may not be

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<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 11:1

in the eyes of others, I could no more deny the experience I had at that time than I could that I exist. It has continued to influence my life ever since.

In addition to my experiences with the Book of Mormon, I've been subject to many other experiences that I can only describe as being primarily spiritual in nature. The most constant and reoccurring of these experiences have probably occurred during times when I was teaching, writing, and giving blessings. At these times I have often had feelings and/or thoughts that have clearly led me along some path or other – telling me what to say and how to say it. In many instances, words have come to my mouth very quickly, without thought or deliberation of any kind. It would be difficult for me to argue against the idea that I was being led by some unseen force during these times. It has been as though the words have “flowed” through me to the audience for which they were intended. Again, these experiences have often involved both my thoughts and my feelings.

Less consistent, though no less meaningful, have been my experiences with certain gifts of the spirit. Some of these gifts are so remarkable and extraordinary that I would not have believed them possible had I not experienced them for myself. Without going into too much detail, included in these experiences have been such things as dreams of future events, feelings enabling me to predict certain events with repeated consistency, the ability to perceive what other people are feeling or thinking (which seems to be especially acute when I'm teaching), immediate and unmistakable answers to specific prayers, seeing beings from beyond the veil, and more. These experiences go way beyond the typical confirmation or “warm feeling” sometimes experienced by hearing a rousing speech or reading a heart-warming story. Many of these experiences have been predictable and able to be repeatedly tested by myself over the span of many years. Some of these experiences have been a part of my life since childhood. Others became more prevalent and recognizable later in life. In the end, I've experimented with them in ways that have not only amazed me but have satisfied my soul that they are real and involve powers beyond those with which mankind is typically aware. As with my experiences with the Book of Mormon and inspiration outlined above, I can only describe these “gifts” as being spiritual in nature.

In addition to these more concrete experiences I've had many other impressions to both my heart and mind that have helped to shape my system of beliefs. Many of these have been difficult to discern from other common feelings or thoughts that may or may not have had their origins in anything truly spiritual. Yet, they likewise cannot be thrown out as true spiritual experience. It is simply difficult at times to tell the two apart.

### **Rational Explanations**

From my youth my nature has always been to ask questions and try to figure things out. I've seldom been satisfied by pat answers or “status quo” rational. For better or for worse, I've challenged everyone from parents and other family members to school and university teachers to church leaders and friends regarding a great many issues. Truth and choosing the “right” way to do things is, and always has been, all-important to me. The study of philosophy in college was a relatively perfect fit for my naturally questioning and logical disposition.

As a result of this natural characteristic, I've always sought the best explanations I could find regarding the gospel and religion in general. I've seldom been satisfied with the standard answers commonly offered on various topics. This has often resulted in difficult discussions with people regarding sensitive subjects. In my search for spiritual and moral truths I've seldom been content to answer only the "what's" of an issue. I've always felt the need to answer the "why's" as well. This has led me down many paths of discovery and reconciliation of otherwise apparent contradictions or difficult problems. At times, it has been both frustrating and rewarding.

Through all of this relatively deep investigation and thought, I have almost unwaveringly been impressed with the solutions provided within LDS theology. While studying philosophy at Brigham Young University, for example, I had a rare opportunity to compare the teachings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, B. H. Roberts, and others to those of the great religious philosophers throughout history. In what can only be described as "amazingly brilliant," these teachings from LDS leaders proved superior time and time again. As partially explained in this volume, philosophical bottomless pits such as the problem of evil, the nature and character of deity, divine foreknowledge and human free will, and others are addressed far more adequately and reasonably within LDS theology than any other religion with which I am familiar. This has been so much the case that I have become convinced that one of two scenarios must be true: Either Joseph Smith was the most underrated, dishonest genius of our time or he was a true prophet getting his thoughts from some power beyond his own. Given the spiritual experiences mentioned above, I can only reasonably opt for the latter explanation.

In addition to comparing LDS theology with other systems of belief, I've found even more credibility by comparing Mormonism against itself. "Mysteries" or apparent contradictions have fallen one by one as I've compared, prodded, and searched the scriptures and words of the leaders with an open mind and a certain amount of sincere prayer. As a result I've come to firmly believe that the greatest truths of Mormonism are those that both solve some of our greatest theological problems and are, at the same time, the least understood by both Mormons and non-Mormons alike. Simple teachings about the nature and character of God, for example, are both beautifully profound and, at the same time, amazingly offensive to many people, including some members of the LDS church. This is unfortunate indeed and has made my search for spiritual truth all the more difficult.

From an intellectual standpoint, studying Mormonism for me has been like putting together a grand puzzle with no complete picture to use as a guide and many unrelated pieces thrown into the pile that must be sifted through and either kept, set aside, or thrown out one by one. Although there are still plenty of loose pieces on the table and the picture is not yet completed – not by a long shot, I feel I've been able to fit too many of the other pieces together to abandon the puzzle now. I honestly feel much of the picture is there before me and I honestly like what I see. It is my firm belief that I will be able to continue adding more pieces to the puzzle and will someday have a complete, finished picture that is both beautiful and makes perfect sense, if not in this life then in the next. In the end I can only say that LDS theology not only offers a vast amount of breadth and depth, but also provides a rational basis for that content. To me, it is practical, rational theology.

## **Moral Principles**

Finally, a large and significant portion of my testimony rests in the simple fact that Mormonism teaches good and wholesome principles as the core of the gospel plan. When all is said and done, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ through the prophet Joseph Smith is all about incorporating unselfish, moral, and righteous principles into the minds and hearts of its followers. All the rest is merely a means to that end. It is my belief that anyone who honestly and open mindedly seeks to embrace the wholesome principles outlined in the scriptures will also love Mormon doctrine and theology in its true form, for it is impossible to separate the two. Those who don't care for such principles are likely to find little lasting comfort within the confines of true Mormonism. Although mistakes and ulterior motives within the LDS church often muddy the water, I believe that the core principles of faith, charity, hope, love, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, humility, gentleness, meekness, diligence, holiness, lowliness of heart, long suffering, and all others found in the scriptures are at the heart of the restored gospel and are good and upright in and of themselves. It is difficult for me to imagine anyone openly desiring to argue or fight against such principles.

Although difficult to understand at times, the more I have studied the doctrines of the restored gospel and the history of the LDS church, the more I have become convinced that Joseph Smith's motives were pure and wholesome – that everything he did was for the direct purpose of promoting and instilling these types of principles into the hearts and minds of the people. I am convinced that these principles describe both Zion and the Celestial Kingdom – the ultimate goals of all things LDS. Within every ordinance of Mormonism, from baptism to endowment to plural marriage, I see these unselfish, loving principles upheld and advanced. In every bit of doctrine, from simple faith to the united order and consecration, I only see a good and unselfish lifestyle that, if honestly lived, would bring about the very heaven we all claim to seek so badly. I could no more reject the truthfulness and goodness of these core principles than I could life itself. Without them, there is no hope. With them, all good things are possible. Inasmuch as these principles are the main focus and motivation behind Mormonism, I am, and will in all likelihood continue to be, a “Mormon.” I love them. I seek them. I wish I were a better example of them. And I am convinced that if all people would embrace and uphold them by keeping the commandments of God and honoring their covenants with all their heart, might, mind, and strength, we would experience the highest degree of joy and happiness available to any living soul.

In the midst of all the controversy and unsolved difficulties found among both early and modern Mormonism, fully recognizing the many challenges and trials involved with upholding such a testimony as that which I have just born, these three areas of focus continue to be the foundation of my belief in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and the prophet Joseph Smith. I am as certain of these things as I am of anything else holding conviction of any certainty in my life. These areas are solid to me. They are not flippant, naïve, or without reason. They are real and provide a solid foundation for my current beliefs as well as any spiritual learning and growth I may realistically expect to experience in the future.

This is why I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored through the prophet Joseph Smith. If I honestly believed that there was anything better under the sun or that would explain the experiences and principles I've mentioned to a greater degree, I feel I would pursue that course

instead. However, as of the time of writing this testimony, I know of no such course that would offer an adequate response to the experiences and principles listed above. To me, Mormonism is verifiable, rational, morally beautiful, and unable to be adequately explained in any other way than to say that Joseph Smith was who he said he was, and the teachings he espoused and promoted are verily true, wholesome, and exalting in nature. To this I bear humble testimony, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.