

# How should we determine spiritual truth?

## Mormon Testimony vs. God's Testimony

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon Church, teaches its members to rely on feelings ("burning in the bosom" and "testimony", etc), to determine spiritual truth. Mormon missionaries persistently ask investigators (prospective converts) to read Moroni 10:4 and pray over the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. God supposedly fulfils this promise of manifesting the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon through a "burning in the bosom."<sup>1</sup> What is a "burning bosom"? What is Mormon "testimony"? Where do inner feelings come from?

### I Burning in the bosom

**Burning bosom is a feeling of peace and assurance that the Holy Ghost supposedly gives a person to confirm (1) the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and (2) an individual's action or decision. The nearest word to describe this feeling is said to be 'burn' or 'burning'.<sup>2</sup> Mormons equate this feeling with the promised revelation mentioned in Moroni 10:4-5.**

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moroni 10:4-5 in the Book of Mormon)

Moroni 10:4-5 assumes that the Book of Mormon is true and the prayer is asking the Holy Ghost to show that the claim that it is not true, is false<sup>3</sup>, which implies that if you have a 'sincere heart' and 'real intent', you will have a confirming testimony, but if you do not have a 'yes' answer, it is entirely your fault, as you are insincere.

### II Mormon Testimony vs. God's Testimony

Most of Mormon standard testimonies contain the following points: **they know that (1) Jesus Christ is the true Son of God, (2) Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, (3) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, and (4) the Book of Mormon is true.** This knowledge is not based on facts but on feelings. Mormons bear their testimony all their lives in monthly "fast and testimony meetings," at the tail end of talks from the pulpit, Sunday School lessons, and missionary discussions or lessons. Mormons also bear their testimony to non-Mormons when challenged about the Mormon belief system, and when Mormons do not know how to answer.<sup>4</sup>

**Evangelical Christians proclaim how our encounter with the risen Christ transformed our lives based on the finished work of the cross.** None of Bible believing Christians' testimonies are identical, as how we encounter Christ varies, but our testimonies are Christ-centred.

God himself is bearing testimony in 1 John 5:9-13. God says that God's testimony is greater than men's testimony. **What is God's testimony? One can have assurance of eternal life through faith in Christ alone (5:13).**

*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.* (1 John 5:9-13-KJV)

### III Where do the inner feelings come from?

The Bible tells us three sources.<sup>5</sup>

[1] **God:** all-powerful God can cause good feelings. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Revelation 19:6).

[2] **Satan:** he is the great deceiver and father of lies can cause good feelings. Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9). People can be hit by fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16).

[3] **Our own heart:** our hearts can be wrong, see what the Bible says about our hearts

*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.* (Proverbs 28:26)

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?* (Jeremiah 17:9)

From these verses those who trust their hearts only, and /or feelings only, can be lead into error. Proverb 14:12 says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

We conclude that praying over the Book of Mormon opens the way to deceiving ourselves.

1 John 4:1 says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." **How can we try the Spirits? The Scriptures are the measuring stick (2 Timothy 3:16-17)**

**What does the Bible say when someone claims new revelation?** “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good” (2Thessalonians 5:21). In Acts 17:11-12, the Bereans were commended, as they searched the Scriptures (the Old Testament) to determine if what they were being told was scriptural and therefore true. Let us check teachings about eternal life in the Book of Mormon against older revelation, the Bible.

#### IV Are you sure that you have eternal life?

The most important questions are how we have eternal life and how we live with the Heavenly Father.

2 Nephi 25:23, frequently quoted by many Mormons, shows a stark contrast with Ephesians 2:8-10.

..... for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The Book of Mormon supposedly contains “the fulness of the everlasting gospel” (Intro to the Book of Mormon, See Doctrine & Covenants 20:9, 42:12,135:3) but does not contain many unique Mormon teachings like eternal life and contains nothing on temple activity. I quoted from another official Mormon scripture, Doctrine & Covenants 131, 132, the following:

In Mormonism, one can go to heaven, but not have eternal life. **Eternal life in Mormonism is synonymous with exaltation: living eternally as a god and having ability to procreate children through eternity.**<sup>6</sup> Mormons must receive the temple endowment and be married in the temple etc. **In the Bible, eternal life is promised to all true Christians and everyone in heaven has eternal life but we are not promised to become gods in heaven.** Apostle John said, “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God”(1 John 5:12,13, See John 5:24). *Eternal life is a gift, not to be earned* (Eph 2:8-10).

Therefore, eternal life as taught by the Mormon Church is not the same as taught in the Bible. It does not pass the biblical test. To pray for an answer about the Book of Mormon is to ignore what God has already said about it.

J.A.C. Redford, a Christian with a Mormon background, had spiritual experience<sup>7</sup> as a Mormon. Redford observes his experiences as a Christian:

After many years spent in the search for peace, LeAnn and I finally found it in God’s redemptive grace. We made a radical break with our past by becoming Christians, but we also recognize the patient unfolding of God’s sovereign purpose through our many diverse experiences over the years. Rather than resenting or repudiating our life as Mormons, we are learning to understand it as part of the continuum of God’s overarching mercy, to see the strands of meaning that wind through it all. In emphasizing the difference between Mormonism and Christianity, I don’t want to lose sight of the consistency of God’s faithfulness in answering our deepest desire for Him.

I believe that my spiritual experiences as a Mormon were predominantly the result of my intense yearning for God. Some of them were moments of genuine inspiration, threads of understanding that God graciously gave and patiently knit together as He drew me to Himself. Some may have been demonic. I ran into problems with my spiritual experiences because I had not been taught to submit them to the judgement of Scripture. This left me vulnerable to deception. I was dead wrong to extrapolate the truth of Mormonism from these experiences, particularly when Mormon doctrine undermined my confidence in the unique authority of the Bible, taught me to worship a false god, and made my efforts the basis of my relationship with him.<sup>8</sup>

**Conclusion:** Mormons may examine the Book of Mormon’s message of eternal life against the Bible, but often conclude wrongly, as they are taught to rely on their feelings. Our heart, a subjective source, is “deceitful above all things.” Mormon spiritual experiences mostly are the product of their own hearts and/or deception. The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of truth” who “will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). All scripture (in the Bible) is God-breathed and is useful, and is the standard, for correcting error (2 Timothy 3:16). We must check the teachings of the Book of Mormon against the older revelations (OT and NT). Teachings of the Book of Mormon, as we have seen, do not square with the truth in the Bible, therefore, we must conclude that those who put trust in the Mormon Church are not led by the Holy Spirit.

#### NOTES

- 1 Doctrine & Covenant 9:8 says, “But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.” (Doctrine & Covenant is one of Mormon scriptures)
- 2 Doctrine & Covenant Student Manual, p.21
- 3 John Farkas, “HOW DO WE TEST FOR SPIRITUAL TRUTHS?” (<http://www.frontiernet.net/~bcmmin/truttest.htm>)
- 4 Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood A- an official Mormon teaching manual p.190
- 5 Jerry and Dianna Benson, *HOW TO WITNESS TO A MORMON* (Chicago, The Moody Bible Institute, 2000)
- 6 Doctrine & Covenants 131:1-4, 132:19-25, 30, 55
- 7 J.A.C. Redford, *Welcome All Wonders: a Composer’s Journey* (Grand Rapids, Baker House, 1997) pp. 45-46
- 8 Ibid.