

2nd Address to Christians
October 19, 2017
J. Erik Jonsson Central Library
Dallas, Texas
Denver Snuffer

This evening I hope to strengthen your belief in Christ and increase your confidence in Him.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1.) It was God’s. But, “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over” the creation. (Gen. 1:26.) God gave to them, Adam and Eve, “dominion.” (Gen. 1:28.)

John tells us who did the creating and who gave man dominion. The Word, who was with God, “all things were made by him.” (John 1:3.) Christ is the light and life of man. (John 1:4.) Luke explained, “he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being[.]” (Acts 17:27-28.)

Another prophet explained our relationship to Christ in these words: “God... has created you, and has kept and preserved you... [He] has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another... Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but it belongeth to him who created you.” (Mosiah 2:20-21, 25.)

We borrow from Christ the power to live and move. Christ is sustaining our lives from moment to moment. Because of this Christ knows our every deed, even our every thought—because we use his power to have our being.

Therefore, Christ can understand us perfectly. Christ can therefore judge us perfectly.

Do not imagine Him as distant, but rest assured He is intimate with each of us.

I am glad to return to Texas. I spent nearly two years here while serving in the military. My oldest daughter was born here. As was mentioned in the introduction, I received a Bachelor’s of Business Administration from McMurry University in Abilene. There are three colleges in Abilene, all of which are affiliated with a religious sponsor. McMurry was affiliated with the Methodist Church.

I was raised by a Baptist mother, at age 19 I joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly called the “Mormon Church”). After forty years to the day, I was excommunicated from the LDS church because I wrote candidly about Mormon history and disagreed with the institution’s questionable telling of their history.

If **you** were to read what I wrote of Mormon history you would think me a defender of the LDS church. But because I questioned the validity of their authority claims, and exposed some of their

unchristian and deplorable acts that provoked the judgments of God against them, the institution considered me an apostate. They viewed my account of history as threatening.

Let me be clear:

I have faith in Christ and know our salvation is found only in Him. I also believe Joseph Smith was an authentic Christian and inspired advocate with a message from God.

I do not believe the LDS church has been faithful to the message God spoke through Joseph Smith, nor has the LDS church told an honest account of their many failures to follow God.

You do not need to join any institution, and certainly do not need to become LDS to respect Joseph Smith or find inspiration in the Book of Mormon. I think the LDS church is in a fallen state, and growing darker year by year.

But I am not here to talk of LDS history. I mention this only so you know my views.

We are here to reflect on Christian history, and to honor the Protestant Reformation.

In 1517 Catholicism was a religious-economic-land-and military monopoly in Europe. Market control leads to laziness, indifference to the needs of the public, and excesses. Catholicism became abusive. It was more feared than loved.

Recently Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the Archbishop of New York, commented on how the Catholic church “cannot deny” it had become corrupt. Dolan said Martin Luther was responsible for “.. the striking of a match, creating a bonfire—the flames of which are still burning,”

Martin Luther was not the first open critic of Catholic abuses. But he succeeded where other, earlier critics were burned at the stake. Luther’s timing was aided by the Guttenburg Printing Press, making it possible for Luther’s 95 Theses to be turned into a pamphlet that was history’s first “best seller.”

But after a millennium and a half of Catholic hegemony, it was not possible for Martin Luther or the other Protestant Reformers to envision Christianity as something that could exist apart from an institution. For a millennium and a half the Christian church had a hierarchy, professional clergy, wealth, cathedrals, icons, pageantry and provided social structure. Anything like Christianity’s original, independently functioning groups meeting in homes, and using donated resources as charity for their poor, was long forgotten. The “Reformation” did not attempt to restore an original Christianity. The Reformers were victims of a structure that confined even their imagination. Their aim was much lower. It sought only to reform an admittedly corrupt institution into something marginally better.

The rebellion of Martin Luther led to the establishment of a new Christian institution that mimicked its mother. The Lutheran Church bears striking similarities to its Roman mother. To a casual observer of a Sunday service in both of these churches can seem identical. The differences are not particularly cosmetic, but are based on Lutheran rejection of the Pope’s authority. There are three great Lutheran principles: (1) Grace Alone; (2) Faith Alone; (3) Scripture Alone. These

deprive the Catholic Pope of religious significance, and the Catholic rites of any claim to be the exclusive way to obtain salvation. But none of these were part of original Christianity:
As to “Grace Alone”:

In original Christianity, baptism is required for salvation:

Christ’s simple command to “follow me” was given repeatedly. (See, Matt; 8:22; Matt. 9:9; Matt. 16:24; Mark 2:14; Mark 10:21; Luke 9:23; John 1:43; John 12:26; among many others.)

Christ showed the way, and as part of that He was baptized to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). It was only after Christ was baptized that the Father commended Jesus and said He was “well pleased.” (Matt. 3:13-17.)

Christ also had His disciples baptize His followers. (John 4:1.)

Christ spoke to Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus and converted him by that contact. (Acts 9:1-6.) Following his conversion, Saul was healed of blindness, renamed Paul, and immediately baptized. (Acts 9:11-18.)

Paul tied baptism to resurrection. (Rom. 6:3-4.) He declared that to be baptized is to “put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:27.) There is only “one faith” and it is in the “one Lord” whom we worship, and it requires “one baptism” to be included in the body of believers. (Eph. 4:5.)

Peter explained that baptism saves us. (1 Peter. 3:21.)

Christians who follow Christ will all be baptized.

If you have not been baptized, or would like to be baptized again, there are those who have authority to administer the ordinance who will travel to you. Some are local and can easily minister. The ordinance is free, and the service is provided without any charge or expectation of any gift or donation. If you are interested you can make a request on the website (christianreformation500years.info/baptism).

Christ taught only one doctrine. He taught a new law, principles, precepts, parables, teachings and commandments; but only one doctrine.

This is the Doctrine of Christ:

Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine. And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost. And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one. And again I say unto you,

ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things. And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them. (3 Ne. 11:31-40.)

Accordingly, original Christianity believed and taught that baptism was essential to salvation, not merely grace.

As to “Faith Alone” the original Christians not only believed in baptism, but also believed they could progress in knowledge, obedience and virtue. Paul denounced the idea that Christians could sin and follow God: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:1-2.) Paul envisioned the Christian as becoming a new creation through baptism, after which we walk in Christ’s path with sin destroyed (Rom. 6:6) from within us: “we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4.)

Peter taught that Christians would progress in godliness until the Christian has his or her calling and election made sure: “that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall[.]” (2 Peter 1:4-10.)

As to “Scripture Alone” Luther had to translate the scriptures into the common tongue. For the preceding 1500 years the common Christian could not read the scriptures. Further, there was no New Testament during the era of original Christianity. The idea of compiling a New Testament was originated by a second-century heretic who was excommunicated for apostasy. The only scriptures used or cited during the time of original Christianity was the Old Testament, containing none of the teachings of Christ, none of the letters of Paul, Peter, James or Jude, and none of the Four Gospels. It took until the fourth-century for a New Testament canon to be settled. By that time many of the writings had been altered.

Further neither Christ nor His apostles handed out a New Testament. They testified of what they knew to be true, and administered baptism as a sign of faith and repentance.

Despite this Martin Luther was entirely correct in condemning Catholicism for its errors and excesses.

Following Luther's example, other Protestant churches reformed Christianity in marginal ways. But reconsidering institutional Christianity and attempting to return to its original form was not even attempted in the Protestant Reformation. Therefore Protestantism is only a marginal improvement from its corrupt mother church. It has never been nor attempted to become original Christianity.

A return to original Christianity would require a Restoration. That did not begin until God spoke to Joseph Smith in 1820. But Joseph's followers also wanted an institution—and now have one of the most wealthy and self-interested institutions claiming to be a church.

Unlike the institutional Christianity of the 1500s, early Christians were called the “Εκκλησια” meaning a “congregation” or “assembly.” But early Christians were not institutional and certainly not hierarchical.

The first century of Christianity had no formal organization, and no central control. Christians met informally in small groups that worshiped together in homes or public places. In this earliest form, small groups led by both men and women who were called “Διακονος” a word translated into English as “Deacon” or “Deaconess.” The Greek word means “servant.” It was in these home meetings where the original Christians worshiped and learned of Christ and Christianity.

Original Christians had no professional clergy. They operated in a way akin to the method described in the Book of Mormon:

And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength. And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted[.] (Alma 1:26-27.)

This is how I believe Christianity ought to be practiced today: Without a professional clergy diverting tithes and offerings that ought to be used to help the poor, needy, sick and afflicted. We need to and can return to those early days of Christianity.

Justin Martyr lived from 110-165 a.d. and wrote in the “sub-apostolic” age. His writings give a glimpse into how Christianity functioned in its earliest days.

In his First Apology, he describes Christian worship. They met in homes, having no church buildings.

Before being considered a Christian, a candidate was baptized “in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.” (*First Apology*, Chapter LXI-Christian Baptism.)

Meetings began with a prayer and “saluting one another with a kiss.” Then sacrament was prepared and administered using bread a “cup of wine mixed with water” which is blessed by “giving praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands.” (*Id.*, Chapter LXV-Administration of the Sacraments.)

The early Christians recognized there was an obligation for “the wealthy among us [to] help the needy.” Therefore, after reading scripture and “the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets” donations were collected. “And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want.” (*Id.*, Chapter LXVII-Weekly Worship of the Christians.) The reference to the “president” is to the one who conducted the meeting that week.

These simple observances were resilient enough to preserve Christianity after the death of the apostles and before any great hierarchical magisterium arose. It was the power of baptism, the sacrament, scripture study and financial aid among believers that gave Christianity its power. But it was diffused, and therefore incapable of destruction. When Justin Martyr was slain, the scattered Christians continued unaffected. It was just like when Peter and Paul were slain, and before them, James was killed. The power of Christianity reckoned from the vitality of its original roots. These roots were in Christ, His message, and teachings, which were employed to relieve one another by the alms shared from rich to poor.

When a centralized hierarchy took control over Christianity, the money that was used for the poor, the widows and orphans, was diverted to building churches, cathedrals, basilicas and palaces. Ultimately, the wealth generated by the generosity of Christian believers became the tool used by the hierarchy to buy up armies, kings, lands and treasures which were used to rule and reign as a cruel master over a subjugated population made miserable by the abuse heaped on them from Rome.

Even after the Protestant Reformation, Christianity continued to be ruled by hierarchies. Cathedrals and church buildings consumed and consume resources that are to be used to help the poor. Christ built no building, although He accepted the temple in Jerusalem as His Father’s house. Peter built no church building. Nor Paul, nor James, nor John. Christianity in the hands of the Lord and His apostles needed no brick and mortar for its foundation. It was built on the hearts of believers, brought together by the charity and assistance shared between them.

Today Christianity is not benefitted, but weakened, by hierarchies, cathedrals, edifices and basilicas housing opulence, wealth and art. Although the prophecies foretell of a temple to God in Zion, and another in Jerusalem, there are no other structures foretold to be built by Christians or latter-day Israel. How much stronger would Christianity be today if wealth were reserved for the poor, and hierarchies were stripped of their wealth?

We would not be undervaluing the Gospel and overvaluing churches if all donations went to aid the poor and none went to support the institutions.

We have a hard time even imagining the earliest generation of Christians. WE also have a tendency to use what we are familiar with as our guide and standard in trying to understand early Christianity. It affects even how we read our scriptures. I'd like you to try to abandon the picture you have in your head and imagine a new picture in its place:

Early Christians were very diverse. There was no one in charge and no attempt to standardize Christianity. These earliest believers were divided into the following kinds of Christians:

Pauline Christians: These believers were grounded in a tradition founded by the Apostle Paul. They claimed to follow the Old Testament and Paul's instructions. They were located in the areas Paul served as a missionary. Paul appointed teachers who were charged with guarding the doctrine from being changed.

Matthian Christians: Followers of Matthew, centered in Antioch, who attempted to form a compromise between Jewish and non-Jewish (Gentile) Christians. It was in Antioch that conflicts in Jewish Christianity were worked out. You read of Matthian Christianity in the Book of Acts, where respect and loyalty to the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem is acknowledged, and Gentile converts were welcomed.

Johannian Christians: Followers of John. These believers tried to keep an original focus on the individual's relationship with Christ alive. They emphasized the indwelling of Christ's Spirit in each Christian. They taught and believed in the pre-earth existence of mankind's spirits. Before the creation, Christ was the Great High Priest of heaven who would redeem the creation by His sacrifice. The strength of their teaching was focusing on the individual's relationship with Christ, and no organization could replace that individual relationship. The idea of "the love of Christ" was preserved in Johannian Christianity. Spirit, knowledge and ritual were designed to preserve knowledge about Christ.

Although lost to western Christianity, John taught that man would become divinitized, or ascend in stages of progression to become just like God. His teaching has been lost, but two passages in his New Testament writings preserve the teaching:

1 John 3:1-3: Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that **we should be called the sons of God**: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, **now are we the sons of God**, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, **when he shall appear, we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is. And **every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.**

In Rev. 3:20-22 Christ is speaking:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. **To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.** He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Petrine Christians: Followers of a tradition traced to Peter. These Christians emphasized authority and viewed their leaders as shepherds over exiles from heaven.

It was the Petrine tradition that led to hierarchical control as a central feature of the later kind of Christianity that survived. In that corrupted system that evolved over time, sheep (that is believers) followed the bishops, who were the successors to the apostles. These bishops were believed to hold a commission to lead the flock.

There was also **Gnosticism** centered in Egypt, claiming to follow John. They believed Christ (and John) taught hidden knowledge, and salvation was related to understanding these mysteries of God.

There were also **Syriac** Christianity and yet another form of Christianity established through Thomas' teachings in India and Asia. Almost all knowledge of the earliest forms of Christian practices has been erased by the destruction of records.

John's teaching of a pre-earth existence for the spirit of Christ and for all mankind did not suddenly disappear. It lingered for centuries. Origin (an early Christian) claimed the original teachings of Christ included that Christ came into this world in possession of knowledge He held from before the creation of this world. Jesus had been so faithful to the "logos" (λογος) or word of the Father that He was entitled to that name, while other spirits were less faithful and some fell away altogether.

Joseph Smith also testified that we all existed as spirits living before the creation of this world. I believe this teaching.

Each human soul is at a different point of **progression** and therefore has different abilities to perceive the truth here. Every person in the world has a distinct spiritual past that began long before the creation of this world. Salvation consists of doing what is necessary in this world to advance individual spiritual progression. The greatest way to progress is to follow Christ.

Joseph Smith, like the apostle John, believed and taught that all of us existed as spirits before the creation of this world. We are spiritual beings having an earthly experience. There is a veil of forgetfulness because, as physical beings, our thoughts are processed through a physical biomechanical connection, limiting our pre-earth memory. This limit is an important part of God's plan. If we had a perfect memory of our pre-earth existence we would not be required to develop faith in Christ. But our spirits know God, and in our quiet moments we all sense our immortality. We are here to be tested and the test is now underway.

Early Christians were very diverse, but they agreed on **two things**: Christ's doctrine (which I read to you) and Christ's law.

The Law of Christ is found in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7.

Once Christians have these two essential teachings in common, you can have differences on other issues, like the early Christians.

Christ's apostle witnesses, like all witnesses, testified from their own background and experience.

Lawyer: Courtroom

Something as simple as RIGHT and LEFT can be unclear:

“Stage Right” –from the stage

“Right Field”-from home plate

Information desk directions.

Because original Christianity was peacefully diverse, the differences found in the earliest forms are somewhat preserved in our New Testament. I received this question from the website:

Is it possible Paul and Jesus taught two different Gospel messages? There is debate such is the case. Or is it Paul expressed the message differently than Jesus did? In other words, did Jesus elaborate more content and less terminology (justification, reconciliation, grace, etc.) and Paul did the opposite? It seems Christ, Peter, James, John's messages were sublime and easy to understand, whereas Paul's letters are difficult to understand and require fitting the pieces together.

Paul was a strict Pharisee following the law. (Phil. 3:5.) Paul persecuted Christ's followers, even assisting when Steven was killed for his testimony of Christ. (Acts 8:1, 22:20.) He had many things to regret. Everything in his life, before his conversion to Christ, gave him a context for understanding Christ and His message. Paul wanted grace, reconciliation and justification because he needed these to have hope.

Peter was a fisherman, but walked alongside Christ for years. He saw Christ heal the sick, heard Him bless the children, and saw Him walk on water. He knew that storms were quieted by Christ's word. He saw the dead rise, and stood on the Mount of Transfiguration when the Father declared Christ was His Son. Peter was as qualified a witness as Paul to testify Christ was the promised Messiah. But we cannot expect two witnesses with such different experiences and from such different backgrounds as Peter's and Paul's to provide identical testimonies of Christ.

Both Paul and Peter understood and explained “Christianity” according to their background, experiences, training and culture.

So long as they agreed on Christ's doctrine, and accepted Christ's law, that was enough. They were both Christian, and provided us with truth.

As the earliest forms of Christianity passed through two generations, mutual respect and acknowledgement of other's Christianity was replaced by competition and conflict.

As they competed with one another, the original Christianity passed away.

There are many ironies in Christian history. Most of them are embarrassing, and therefore not widely mentioned. In that regard, Christian history and Mormon history share the tendency for selective recollection.

Christianity changed over the first two centuries: Change of any kind was a signal that the original had passed away. Since God is the same yesterday, today and forever, a change to His religion suggested that God was no longer in charge. It was during this time that an “αποστασια” or rebellion took place and the foundation of Christian belief splintered. The Greek word is where we get the English word “apostasy” and it implies a sudden event, and deliberate rebellion.

The original “followers of the way” taught by Christ, gave way to those who wanted to have both a form of Christianity and worldly popularity. Christianity was intended to change the world, but the world changed Christianity. Christian converts of this later time were unacquainted with the original beliefs. As groups struggled for control instead of Christian tolerance, less and less of the apostles’ original teachings were retained.

The debates even resulted in changing the scriptures to support one interpretation over another. Bart Erhman has tracked some of the changes made to what would become New Testament texts in his book: *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. Even the scriptures we use today were compromised during these second and third century Christian struggles. In less than two centuries the Mormons have also altered and corrupted their scriptures. It is one of the reasons I suggest Christians would benefit from study of Mormon history. Their fall mirrors in most ways the Christian apostasy.

There emerged one interpretation or faction of Christianity that became identified as the proto-orthodox form. It would win, over time, and become the Roman Catholic Church.

Original Christianity did not have “orthodoxy” and “heresy”—these are terms that were adopted once the proto-orthodox advocates sensed victory. They branded their view as orthodox and everything else heretical. Once heresy was identifiable, it was suppressible, and proto-orthodoxy could persecute and suppress their competition with the confidence of sensing their coming complete victory. Those who disagreed or opposed could be excommunicated for heresy.

The proto-orthodox form of Christianity improved its appeal by assuring the uneducated that there was no need to learn about Christ or His actual teaching, men could be saved in ignorance as long as they accepted the sacraments or ordinances offered by those who had authority. Christ was displaced, and faith was replaced by allegiance to an institution. This made for lazy believers who accepted a convenient religion.

Once there was a universal or “catholic” church, it owned the religion. As property of the institution, the religion was used to gain economic power, wealth, control society, and suppress anything considered a threat to its power. Even kings were subordinate to the pontiff in Rome.

One of the most hotly debated topics by Christians in the second and third centuries was the nature of God. The Gospel accounts, letters of the apostles, and common sense describe Jesus Christ as a mortal man. Jesus was carried by a pregnant woman, born after a normal period of gestation, grew through childhood into adulthood, walked, talked, ate, slept, tired, rested, suffered, bled and died. Every action He took was human. His Father, a separate Being, spoke from heaven at Jesus baptism (Matt. 3:16-17), and again on the Mount of Transfiguration where Christ's Father spoke from out of a bright cloud veiling His personage from view (Matt. 17:5).

Nothing in the New Testament makes Christ and His Father the same personage. Even His declaration that He and the Father "are one" is explained in terms that clarify they are two distinct persons:

Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, **that they may be one, as we are**....They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. ...Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; **That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us:** that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; **that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one;** and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:11, 16-18, 20-23.)

The idea that the Father and the Son were only "one" in the same way mankind became "one" or unified by agreement and purpose was unacceptable to many third and fourth century Christians. The idea was regarded as polytheistic and a tradition of monotheism carried forward from Judaism into Christianity made this unacceptable.

The earliest Christians thought nothing was improper with the Father and Son being separate and distinct. The Old Testament begins with plural Gods: "Let **us** make man in **our** image." (Gen. 1:26.) ("Elohim" —meaning "Gods" is the plural of "El"—meaning "God".) Indeed Paul contemplated a structure of heaven that included many "lords" and many "gods":

For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (**as there be gods many, and lords many,**) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1 Cor. 8:5-6.)

One of the disputes wrongly decided at Nicea was the nature of God. Was the godhead, as taught by Eusebius "homoiousios" (ὁμοούσιος) meaning "of a similar substance" or, as taught by Athanasius, instead "homoousios" (ὁμοούσιος) meaning "the same identical substance" as God the Father? The council at Nicea did not claim to have revelation or inspiration to answer this question. They only voted and adopted Athanasius' definition of God, giving birth to the "Trinity"—an orthodox teaching that has become the litmus test used ever since for determining "true Christianity" from heresy.

I believe they got it wrong at Nicea and have been wrong ever since. Because Christ taught in John 17:3: “And this is life eternal, that they might [FIRST] know **thee the only true God**, and [SECOND] **Jesus Christ**, whom thou hast sent.” Christ’s definition of eternal life separates the Father from the Son, and requires us to know BOTH.

A new Dispensation of the Gospel began with Joseph Smith. It continues today. There are now more revelations and more scriptures given to us by Christ. At this moment the work of laying out and formatting all of the scriptures, Old Covenants (those given to Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses), New Covenants (those given to Jews and gentiles), Teachings & Commandments (given today), for publication is underway. The Book of Mormon foretold how the Gentiles would react to new scriptures:

[M]any of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible. ...Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible.

... [B]ecause that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever. Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written. (2 Nephi 29:3, 6, 9-10.)

The new edition of scriptures will soon be available on Amazon in an inexpensive paperback version. A higher cost leather-bound, onionskin print version should be available by Christmas of this year. They confirm that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. The purpose of the new Dispensation is to make it possible again for mankind to know both God the Father and His Son.

There was a remarkable event during the last two weeks of Christ’s mortal ministry:

And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: **sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.** And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! ...

Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. (Luke 18:18-34.)

This man is referred to in scripture by,

Luke: “a certain ruler”

Matthew: “the young man”

Mark: “one” who “came running”

John: doesn't mention

What if he did as Christ asked? He would have been with Christ during the final two weeks of His life. He would have seen Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He would have heard the crowds shout “Hosannah!” He would have heard Christ denounce the scribes and Pharisees as “Hypocrites” in the temple. He would have been there for the anointing of Christ to prepare Him for death. He would have eaten dinner and seen Lazarus, who Jesus had raised from the dead. He would have been there when the sacrament of the Lord's supper was first introduced by Christ. He would have witnessed the crucifixion. He would have seen the resurrected Lord. And we would know his name.

It is possible we could have another Gospel or letters written by him as yet another witness of Christ's passion and resurrection.

Instead he left sorrowful. Because he cared for his riches.

The challenge is still the same. I have come here to invite you to come follow Christ. I hope you do not walk away sorrowful and fail to participate in this Dispensation now underway.

We are a small assembly of believers and we worship in homes. We have no buildings. If we have a larger event like this, or a conference, we rent the facility. Everything is paid for by donations. All work is done by volunteers.

Although we are small, we are worldwide. I have come to invite you to participate with us in worshiping Christ and practicing His doctrine.

We have authority to baptize. But we are not jealous of our authority and will share it with any man who accepts and practices Christianity as we do.

It may seem odd to you to consider Joseph Smith as an authentic Christian. It may seem odder still to hear me say that Mormonism has rejected Joseph and Mormons were responsible for persecuting, rejecting and ultimately killing him. Particularly when today the LDS church claims they have succeeded Joseph as God's vehicle for salvation. The LDS church, like the Roman Catholic Church, has no inspiration to offer and therefore both rely on hollow claims to have authority. When an institution's greatest claim is its authority, they have lost Christ's message.

Joseph Smith never finished his work. He was killed when 38 years old. His last year of life show he was headed in a very different direction than where the Mormon churches have now arrived. I would not make Joseph Smith responsible for what you see today in the LDS church.

Christ came as “the least”—as a servant kneeling to wash feet—as a teacher of righteousness. He invited, persuaded and taught; He did not demand respect for His authority. He submitted to

abuse, rejection and ultimately to being slain. He loved mankind. Those who demand their authority be respected are anti-Christ because they oppose the core of Christ's example. We are most Christian when we are most like Christ.

I have written a book to help explain Joseph Smith titled *A Man Without Doubt*. If you are interested in reading it I have brought 20 copies to give away. If you are not interested in reading it, please do not take a copy.