



# The LifeLine



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“Contending for the faith”

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## Essential Christian Doctrine: Jesus Christ’s or Joseph Smith’s?

Webster’s New World Dictionary defines “doctrine” as “Teachings...something taught as the principles...of a religion...”

What doctrine must one believe to be a Christian? The answer is found in the Bible.

What doctrine must one believe to be an RLDS Restorationist (RLDS) or a Community of Christ (CoC) member? The answer is found in the writings of Joseph Smith and his successors.

Consider some of the differences between the principles of these two doctrines:

### The Trinity

**Bible:** There is one God manifested in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” (1 Jn 5:7; see also Mt 28:18-19).

Joseph Smith et al: In RLDS and CoC church scriptures, the Holy Spirit is referred to as “it” as if not a person, but a force or a presence. See the *Book of Mormon* (BOM), Alma 19:8; *Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C), 76:4d; the *Holy Scriptures –Inspired Version* (IV), Rom 8:16. Note: the term Holy Ghost is used instead of Holy Spirit in the *Book of Mormon*.

### The Person of Jesus Christ

**Bible:** Jesus is fully God, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Jn 1:1). Jesus is also fully human, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (Jn 1:14; see also Gal 4:4). Jesus was sent to earth to save us from our sins. “...the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world...” (1 Jn 4:14), “...in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col 1:14).

Joseph Smith et al: In Joseph Smith’s *Inspired Version* of the Bible, Jn 1:1 is re-written so Jesus is not God but “of God.” In Joseph Smith’s *Lectures on Faith* (7:9jk), Jesus is described not as Savior of the world but as a “saved being.” Despite the above, the CoC currently states they believe Jesus is fully human and fully divine. (CoC *Basic Beliefs*, www.cofchrist.org/basic-beliefs)

### Sin

**Bible:** We are all born with a sin nature inherited from Adam, “...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...” (Rom 5:12; see also 1 Jn 1:8). This sin nature is a barrier that separates us from God, “...all have sinned and come short of the glory of God...” (Rom 3:23; see also Isa 59:2). Jesus came to remove the sin barrier between us and God. He shed His blood for the remission (forgiveness) of our sins. Jesus said, “...this is My blood... which is shed for many for the remission of sins...” (Mt 26:28). Hebrews 9:22 tells us, “...without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

Joseph Smith et al: We are born without a sin nature, (BOM, Moroni 8:9; D&C, 28:13a; IV, Gen 17:11). The remission of sins occurs through water baptism (D&C, 55:1b,68:4b, IV, Luke 1:76).

### Water Baptism

**Bible:** Water baptism is an evidence of our salvation, not a means to it. “...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved...” (Acts 16:31). “...many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.” (Acts 18:8) “Those who accepted his message were baptized...” (Acts 2:41). “Simon himself believed and was baptized.” (Acts 8:13).

Joseph Smith et al: Water baptism is a requirement for salvation (BOM, Alma 5:27,28; 3 Nephi 5:34; D&C, 16:4e, 17:5d; CoC *Basic Beliefs*: Salvation, www.cofchrist.org/basic-beliefs).

### Salvation

**Bible:** Salvation is Jesus’ free gift, available to all who will believe in Him. “...through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men,” (Rom 5:18). “...Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God...” (1Pet 3:18). Jesus’ unselfish act removes the sin barrier between God and those individuals willing to repent and to be reconciled to Him. Jesus said, “Repent and believe in the gospel...” (Mk 1:15). The apostle Paul wrote, “...God...has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus

Christ...” (2 Cor 5:18); “... the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord...” (Rom 6:23).

Joseph Smith et al: Our salvation begins with water baptism and depends on us keeping God’s commandments. (See **Water Baptism** above, also BOM, 1 Nephi 7:69; D&C, 12:3b; 97:4d).

Note: This belief is refuted by the account of the criminal on the cross, as recorded in Luke 23. Because he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus told him, “...today you will be with Me in Paradise.” The criminal was not baptized, he kept no commandments, he just believed Jesus was who He said He was. His belief resulted in him going to paradise to be with Jesus after his death.

### Scripture

**Bible:** Scripture is the written Word of God. It reveals the life and purpose of the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. He taught, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God...” (Luke 4:4). Jesus declared to His Father, “Your word is truth...” (Jn 17:17). The apostle Paul wrote, “...the Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God –breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:15-17).

Joseph Smith et al: “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God...” (*An Epitome of Faith and Doctrine*, Statement 8). The *Doctrine and Covenants*, a collection of revelations to church prophets is also considered to be scripture. Some in the CoC view the works of modern writers to be scripture: “Many of us believe that numerous contemporary writers...have written scripture that... exceeds much found in the Bible...and... also speaks more appropriately to our day and time...” (*Saints Herald* Feb. 1995, p.19).

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### Gospel

**Bible:** The gospel is the good news of mankind's salvation from sin—available through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. *"...I declare to you the gospel...by which also you are saved...that Christ died for our sins... that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..."* (1 Cor 15:1-4; see also Rom 1:16). When we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and give our life to Him, our sins are forgiven, *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins..."* (Eph 1:7), and we are promised eternal life with Him, *"...this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life..."* (Jn 6:40).

Joseph Smith et al: The CoC *Basic Beliefs*: Salvation statement (see above) speaks of the gospel but does not mention Jesus' death on the cross or His blood shed to pay for our sins. Nor is His Resurrection mentioned, which signified His victory over sin and death. Joseph Smith taught that through Christ's atonement all mankind may be saved, but he added the

phrase, "by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel." (*An Epitome of Faith and Doctrine*, Statement 3)

Note: The Biblical gospel does not consist of laws and ordinances; it consists of belief in Jesus Christ as Savior of the world and having faith in His ability to forgive our sins and save our souls. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Eph 2:8,9). *"... a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ...."* (Gal 2:16) *"...for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."* (Gal 2:21) *"... Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."* (Rom 10:4).

### Conclusion

There are stark differences between Biblical doctrine and that of Joseph Smith and his successors. These differences can be traced back to Joseph Smith's view of the Bible as a corrupted book, with some portions removed and others mistranslated over the centuries. An early publication of Joseph Smith's church describes the Bible as faulty and indecent and states, "...the bible, instead of the hearts of men, must be

PURIFIED!" (*The Evening & Morning Star*, July 1833, p. 106). However, over a hundred years later, that belief was proven untrue with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Scholars were amazed at how few differences there were between the ancient discoveries and contemporary Biblical texts. There is no need for new books of scripture, modern day prophets or continuing revelation—we already have everything we need in the Bible. (2 Tim 3: 15-17).

Essential Christian Doctrine as found in the Bible culminates in the gospel—the good news that God loves us, Jesus died for us and we can be born again into the family of God to live with Him forever. Once we are saved, we are commissioned to share this good news of salvation through Jesus, with the world, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel...and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."* (Mk 16:15; Mat 28:19).

Joseph Smith's doctrine and that of his successors teaches a bloodless, works-based gospel that can save no one; a gospel that will only result in separating us from God for eternity.

So, Jesus Christ's doctrine? Or Joseph Smith's doctrine? Which will you choose?

(Biblical Scriptures cited are from the King James Version, the New King James Version, and the New International Version.)

*"Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me."*

John 7:16

*"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."*

2 John 9

*"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"*

John 14:6

Coming in the next issue: Christian Leaders evaluate Joseph Smith's doctrine.

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