

Second Address to All Christians

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J. Erik Jonsson Central Library
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No matter how interesting or uninteresting proves to be this evening, we have to vacate this place in its entirety by eight o'clock. And so, we'll end at 7:30 sharply, even mid-sentence, perhaps.

I hope to strengthen your belief in Christ this evening and to increase your confidence in Him as WHO and WHAT He really is. The first verse of the Bible reads: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth* (Genesis 1:1 KJV). When it was created, it was God's. Everything belonged to Him. Twenty-six verses later it says: *...God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over...* (Genesis 1:26 KJV) the Creation. God, who owned the Earth, gave dominion over His property to man—to the man Adam and the woman Eve.

John tells us who it was that did the creating and who it was that gave man dominion over the Earth: *the Word [who] was with God...* John describes, *All things were made by him*. That's in John 1:3 [1:1-3]. Christ is the light and the life of man. That's the next verse. Luke explains in the book of Acts: *...he [meaning God] be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being...* (Acts 17:27-28 KJV).

Another prophet explained our relationship to Christ in these words:

...God...has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and...[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 belongs 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. Christ can, therefore, understand us perfectly. And at the end of all of this, Christ can, therefore, judge us perfectly, because it's not just what you do, it's why you did it—and He knows that, too, about every one of us.

Do not imagine Christ as a being who is distant from you—that's incorrect. You should envision Him as someone who is *intimate* with you.

I'm glad to return to Texas. I spent nearly two years here while I was in the military. My oldest daughter was born here in Texas and was... It was mentioned a moment ago that I graduated—I got a Bachelor's of Business Administration from McMurry University in Abilene. In Abilene, there were three colleges at the time, and every one of them is supported or sponsored by a religious institution. The one that I attended was sponsored by the Methodist church.

I was raised by a Baptist mother. At age 19, I joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (it's commonly called the Mormon church). After 40 years *to the day*—from the day I was baptized—I was excommunicated from the LDS Church because I wrote candidly about Mormon history and disagreed with the institution's questionable retelling of its history.

One of the things about the Bible is the characters about whom we read are not spared. When they mess things up (committing adultery and murder, as did King David), we know about it. When errors are made and Peter denies the Lord three times before the cock crowed twice, we know about it. That's not true about Mormon history. What you get there is very sanitized and somewhat misleading—and in some places, horribly so.

If you, as a Christian, were to read what I wrote of Mormon history,¹ you would think I was a defender of the LDS Church, but because I questioned the validity of their authority claims and exposed some of their un-Christian 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 to them.

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'm not here to talk of LDS history. I mention this only so *you* can understand and know what *my* views are. We're 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. Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the Archbishop of New York today, commented on how the Catholic Church cannot deny it had become corrupt. Dolan said

¹ Snuffer, Denver. *Passing the Heavenly Gift*. Salt Lake City: Mill Creek Press, 2011

Martin Luther was responsible for the “striking of a match, creating a bonfire, the flames of which are still burning.”²

Martin Luther³ 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 Gutenberg printing press, making it possible for Martin Luther’s *95 Theses* to be turned into a pamphlet that turned out to be history’s first bestseller. But after a millennium-and-a-half of Catholic hegemony, it was not possible for Martin Luther or the other Protestant Reformation fathers 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, 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 Catholic mother. To a casual observer of a Sunday service in both of these churches, they 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 principals: First, grace alone; second, faith alone; third, Scriptures 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: Three times it’s recorded in Matthew, twice it’s recorded in Mark, once in Luke, and twice in John. Christ showed the way, and as part of that, He was baptized to (according to His own mouth) ...*fulfil all righteousness* (Matthew 3:15 KJV). It was only after Christ WAS baptized that the Father commended Jesus and said He was well pleased. Christ also had His disciples baptize His followers (you can read about that in John chapter 4).

² Adamski, Mary (2017, September 21) The fire that Luther started. *Hawaii Catholic Herald*
<http://www.hawaiicatholicherald.com/2017/09/21/mary-adamski-the-fire-that-luther-started/>

³ Martin Luther (November 10, 1483 to February 18, 1546) was a German monk who began the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, becoming one of the most influential and controversial figures in Christian history.

Christ spoke to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and converted Him by that contact. Following his conversion, Saul was healed of blindness, renamed Paul, and immediately baptized. Paul tied baptism to resurrection in Romans chapter 6. He declared that to be baptized is to *put on Christ* in Galatians 3. There is only one faith, and it is in only the one Lord whom we worship, and it requires one baptism to be included in the body of believers, according to Ephesians. Peter explained that baptism saves us (in First Peter chapter 3).

Christians who follow Christ will all be baptized. If you've 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, or there are some locally who are available to perform the ordinance. The ordinance is free. The service is provided without any charge or expectation of any gift or donation. If you're interested, you can make a request on the website that's identified in things that are around here, LearnofChrist.org.

Christ taught only **one** doctrine. He taught a new law. He taught principles, precepts, parables, teachings, and commandments—but he only taught 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...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 Nephi 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 they 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?* (Romans 6:1-2 KJV). Paul envisioned the Christian as becoming a new creation through baptism, after which we walk in Christ’s path with sin destroyed. *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.* (It’s in Romans chapter 6).

Peter taught that Christians would progress in godliness until the Christian has his or her calling and election made sure:

*..that by these [things] 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 [be neither] 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 KJV, emphasis added)*

As to “Scripture alone”: Luther translated the Bible from a second language that was not commonly spoken (that is, Latin) into the common language of Germany in order for the common man to read it. If Scripture alone defined faith, given the illiteracy that had gone on for a millennium-and-a-half before Martin Luther’s day, and given the fact that even the literate would’ve had to have been bilingual—whatever country or language they spoke, Latin had become a dead language; they would have to be able to read and understand a dead language—then by definition, if that’s one of the keys to defining Christianity, Martin Luther just defined the overwhelming majority (practically **all** of the Christian world) was incapable of salvation because Scripture alone was unavailable to them as one of the required premises of Christianity.

There was no New Testament during the era of original Christianity. The idea of compiling a New Testament originated with a second century heretic who was excommunicated for apostasy.⁴ 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 1820,⁵ 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. They are undertaking approximately a trillion-dollar real estate development as part of the Church's enterprise⁶ in the state of Florida, constructing everything that it will be necessary—from schools and streets, to fire stations and homes—to house over half a million people just outside of Disney World on what used to be 133,000-acre cattle ranch. That church owns about 3% of the state of Florida.

Unlike the institutional Christianity of the 1500s, early Christians were called the *ecclesia*⁷ meaning “a congregation or an 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 and worshiped together in homes or public places. In this earliest form, small groups led by both men and women who were called *deaconisse* (a word that is translated into English as either “deacon” or “deaconess”—that Greek word means “servant”), it was in these home meetings where original Christians worshiped and learned of Christ and Christianity.

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

⁴ Marcion of Sinope

⁵ *Pearl of Great Price*. Joseph Smith - History

⁶ (2015, October 18) Massive Mormon ranch plan in Florida draws scrutiny. *CBS News*
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/massive-mormon-deseret-ranch-plan-orlando-florida/>

⁷ or ekklesia

*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, emphasis added)

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 he wrote in the “sub-apostolic” age. His writings give us 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 the Lord of the universe, and 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 a “cup of wine mixed with water” and bread 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.” (Ibid., 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” (ibid., chapter LXVII: Weekly Worship of the Christians), donations were collected. Then the donations were distributed to help those who were poor or needy among that group of Christians.

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, His

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 build 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 to be built in Zion and another to be built 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 under-valuing the gospel and over-valuing the 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're 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 that 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.

- **Matthean Christians.** Followers of Matthew, centered in Antioch, who attempted to form a compromise between Jewish and non-Jewish (or Gentile) Christians. It was in Antioch that the conflicts in Jewish Christianity were worked out. You read of Matthean Christianity in the Book of Acts where respect and loyalty to the Jewish temple at Jerusalem is acknowledged, but Gentile converts were welcomed.
- **Johannine Christians.** These are 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 man’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 individuals’ relationship with Christ and no organization could replace that individual relationship.

The idea of the love of Christ was preserved in Johannine Christianity. Spirit, knowledge, and ritual were designed to preserve knowledge of 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 teachings have been lost, but two passages in the New Testament writings of John preserve that teaching still. First John 3, beginning at verse 1:

*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...purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3, emphasis added)*

And then, in Revelation chapter 3, beginning in verse 20, it is Christ who 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. (Revelation 3:20-22, emphasis added)*

- **Petrine Christians.** These were followers of a tradition that could be 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. Peter’s original teachings evolved and changed, and Peter can’t be held accountable for what

occurred in a corrupted system. As it evolved, sheep—that is, believers—followed 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. They claimed to follow John. They believed Christ and John taught hidden knowledge, and salvation was related to understanding these mysteries of God.
- There was also **Syriac Christianity**, and yet **another form of Christianity established through Thomas’s teaching** in India and Asia.

Almost all knowledge of the earliest forms of Christian practices have 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.

Origen, an early Christian,⁸ 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*, or “word of the Father,” that He was entitled to that as His name. He exemplified the word of the Father. You wanna know what the Father said? “Look to Christ,” because everything Christ did was an example of that word of the Father. Other spirits who were less faithful—and some of whom fell away altogether—are involved also with this world.

Joseph Smith also testified that we all existed as spirits living before the creation of this world,⁹ and I believe this as a teaching. Each human soul is at a different point of progression and, therefore, has different abilities to perceive the truth here.¹⁰ 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 spirit 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 the world. We are spirit beings having an earthly experience. There’s a veil of forgetfulness because, as physical beings, our thoughts are processed through a physical bio-mechanical 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.

⁸ Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185 – ca. 254)

⁹ See Abraham 3:22

¹⁰ See Abraham 3:19

Early Christians were very diverse, but they agreed on two things: Christ's doctrine (which I read to you a moment ago) and Christ's law. The law of Christ is found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7). Once Christians have these two essential teachings in common, you **can** have differences on other issues—just like the early Christians.

Christ's apostle witnesses, like all witnesses, testified from their own background and experience. In the courtroom, when you have witnesses testifying to some event that took place, you can have a group of people at the same place, observing the same event, and they will testify, under oath, swearing to tell the truth under penalty of perjury (they go to jail if they lie), and their stories will be markedly different from one another. That's because in this world, our orientations, our understanding, and our perceptions differ depending upon the spot we stood at at the moment we witness something.

I assume all of you think you know the difference between left and right. I was in a hospital going to visit a fellow who had had open heart surgery about a week ago, and at the information desk, I'm facing her, and she's facing me. She says to me, "You go down the hall to the right..." Umm, okay... That's your perception. Mine is: I must go down the hall to the left. It is the opposite of what she's saying, but she's giving me the directions from the vantage point she occupies.

From home plate, right field is to the batter's right. But if you're in right field, you're playing to the extreme left. (And I hope the Astros succeed in what... No god-fearing Christian would root for the New York Yankees to make it to the World Series. And I don't know, is that game underway? Do we have a score?)

Because original Christianity was peacefully diverse, the differences found in the earliest forms are somewhat preserved in our New Testament. I got a question from the website. I'm reading you the question that came in: "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, et cetera, 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." So, let's take a look at those two witnesses.

Paul was a strict Pharisee who followed the law. Paul persecuted Jesus' followers, even assisting when Stephen was killed for his testimony of Christ.¹¹ He had a great many things to regret. Everything in his life before his conversion to Christ gave him a context for

¹¹ The stoning of Stephen (Acts 6:8-8:1)

understanding Christ and Christ's message. Paul **wanted** grace, reconciliation, and justification because he **needed** these to have hope.

Peter was a fisherman, but he walked alongside Christ for years. He saw Christ heal the sick, heard Him bless the children, 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 us 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 others' 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 this tendency for selective recollection.) Christianity changed over the first two centuries. Change of that kind was a signal that the original had passed away. Since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, a change to His religion suggests that God was no longer in charge. It was during this time that an *apostasia*—a Greek word from which we get the word "apostasy"—or rebellion took place and the foundation of Christian belief splintered.

Apostasy implies a sudden event and a 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 latter 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 Ehrman has tracked some of the changes made to what would become the New Testament texts in his book titled *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. (Interesting title: *The **Orthodox** Corruption of Scripture*.)

Even the Scriptures we use today were compromised during the second and third century Christian struggles, almost following an identical pattern—which is one of the reasons why I've suggested the study of Mormonism and the history of Mormonism to Christians. Mormons have changed their Scriptures, and they've only been around 180 years. So,

within a 180-year window, you can see a pattern in what has gone on in Mormonism that mirrors the research that Bart Ehrman has done in showing the orthodox corruption of Scripture.

When Christ was originally baptized, the voice that was heard from Heaven did not say, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*¹² The original text says, *Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee*, which is a quote from Psalms 2:7 (Psalms two, ~~chapter~~ [verse] seven).

During the second and third century debates, one of the arguments that was put forth was that Christ was just a man and not the Son of God, and He became the Son of God at His baptism when God accepted Him. Now none of us believe that. We believe He is the Son of God. We've got the account in Matthew, and we've got the account in Luke. We know that He was born, and the angel Gabriel announced to Mary; we know this story, and we know His Father.

But it was being debated during the second and third century, and that verse tended to support a doctrine that was defeated as proto-orthodoxy converted into orthodoxy. They were winning the debate, and they changed the verse. However, when Paul wrote his epistle to the Hebrews, he quotes Psalms 2:7, and Paul wrote more... They just didn't get around to changing that one. (Shoot, the editors missed one!)

Over time there emerged one interpretation or faction of Christianity that became identified. It was originally proto-orthodox, and then it became orthodox as it won over time, and that became the Roman Catholic religion. "Catholic" means "universal," means "all."

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

These proto-orthodox Christians decided to improve the appeal of Christianity by assuring the uneducated that there was no need to learn about Christ or His actual teaching. Men could be saved in ignorance so 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

¹² See Matthew 3:17

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. That threatened open warfare in the Roman Empire once Constantine adopted Christianity as the religion of the state for the Roman Empire. He had no clue there was that much debate over the nature of God. But the views were not going to be surrendered easily.

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—and again on the Mount of Transfiguration, where Christ's Father spoke from out of a bright cloud veiling His personage from view. Nothing in the New Testament makes Christ and His Father the same personage. I want to emphasize that: **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...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, [and] they may be made perfect in one.** (John 17:11, 16-18,20-23 KJV, emphasis added)*

The idea that the Father and the Son were only one in the same way mankind becomes one (or unified) by agreement and purpose was unacceptable to many of the 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. I read this verse a moment ago: *Let **us** make man in **our** image* (Genesis 1:26 KJV, emphasis added). The “us”

and “our” is a word, “Elohim,” which is the plural form of the word, “El”: *El* being “God”; *Elohim* being “Gods.” 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 [by] him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1 Corinthians 8:5-6 KJV)

One of the disputes that was wrongly decided at the counsel of Nicea (called by King Constantine to resolve Christian disputes) was the nature of God.¹³ Was the Godhead (as taught by Eusebius) *homiosios*, meaning “of a similar substance” or was God (as taught by Athanasius), instead, *homoosious*, meaning “the same identical substance” as God the Father? The counsel 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’m gonna pause and make an aside: Original Christianity wouldn’t care. If you accepted the doctrine of Christ and the law of Christ and you were baptized, you could believe in either one of these—and Paul would suggest that with time and with discussion and with fellowship, we would eventually come into the unity of faith. But the unity of faith may be a distant goal, particularly among today’s Christians.)

They voted. The Trinity became the litmus test for heresy, and 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 and continues today. There are now more revelations and more Scripture given to us by Christ. At this moment, the work of laying out and formatting all of the Scriptures—Old Testaments (and the volume has the plural “Testaments” because it includes covenants made with Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses—but it’s what you know as the Old Testament), New Testaments (again, plural because it was given first to the Jews and then taken to the Gentiles; it’s a multiple covenant-making opportunity), and then a third volume called Teachings and Commandments—are being prepared for publication at present.

The Book of Mormon foretold how the Gentiles would react to new Scripture:

¹³ The Council of Nicea took place in AD 325 by order of the Roman Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantine.

...many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, ...there cannot be any more Bible.

Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible.

...because 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...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, and a higher cost, leather-bound, onionskin print version should be available by Christmas this year.¹⁴ 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 that occurred during the last two weeks of Christ's life. And I wanna read you—and then talk about—that.

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, [that] thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, [and] follow me.

...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

¹⁴ Restoration Edition Scriptures - <http://scriptures.info/scriptures>

this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. (Luke 18:18-24,31-34 KJV)

That incident occurred when Christ changed the trajectory of His ministry and determined to go up to Jerusalem to be killed—and He knew that’s what He was doing. And He invited the young man, “dispose of your property, give it to the poor, and come and follow me.”

In the Scriptures, Luke calls this fellow “a certain ruler.” Matthew calls him “the young man.” Mark describes him as “one who came running.” John doesn’t mention him at all. What if he had done as Christ invited him to do?

- 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 His death.
- He would have eaten dinner and seen Lazarus, whom 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 perhaps most importantly, **we would know His name**—because he wouldn’t have been able to participate in all those events and remained unnamed in Scripture. Now, it’s **possible**, had he accompanied them, that we would have another gospel—having been written by him as yet another witness of Christ’s passion and resurrection. Instead, he left sorrowful because he cared for his riches.

What Christ asks of us today is no different than what Christ asked of the unnamed man who left sorrowful as he turned to head to Jerusalem. It’s never convenient to follow Christ. It’s never without its anxieties and its sacrifices.

There is a small group of us who believe as we do—in an original form of Christianity. We believe in gathering tithes and donations and then using them to help people among us. We don’t own any buildings, and we don’t anticipate ever owning a building unless God commands that that new temple in Zion be built by us—but that would be the only thing. We rent places like this (from people who donate to allow the rental to take place). This is being broadcast on the internet by people who have voluntarily come here, brought the

resources to do it, and are broadcasting this event right now. People who came down here to prepare the way paid their own way and sacrificed to do it.

The only way you can have faith is through sacrifice. You can believe a lot of things, but faith requires you to act on your belief and to act consistent with that belief, which is exactly what the young man did not do. The only reason why he came to Christ as an advisor—to ask of Him, “What can I do to inherit eternal life”—is because he had confidence that Christ could answer the question and give him the truth. He respected Christ. He believed in Him as a messenger of eternal life. But when he heard the message, he stopped short and retained whatever belief he had. But he did not develop faith, because faith is acquired in one and only one way—and that is by sacrifice. I hope you do not walk away sorrowful and fail to participate in a new dispensation underway.

We’re a small assembly of believers. We worship in homes. We have no buildings. And in a larger event like this, we rent the facility. Everything is done and all work is done by volunteers and people that contribute. Although we’re small, we are worldwide. I’ve come, in part, to invite you to participate with us in worshipping Christ and practicing His doctrine.

We have authority to baptize, but we’re not jealous of our authority, and we’ll 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 in its authority, they have lost Christ’s message.

Joseph Smith never finished his work. He was killed when 38 years old.¹⁵ His last year of life showed 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.

¹⁵ Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum Smith, were killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844.

I've written a book to try and help explain Joseph Smith.¹⁶ The title of the book is *A Man Without Doubt*. I've brought 20 copies to give away. You don't need to pay for it. No one's here to take any money for it. We don't want any money from you. But if you will read the book, it will acquaint you with Joseph Smith in a way that I think shows he is an authentic Christian. If you'd like a copy, it's yours for free. They are on the back table, and someone will show you how to get a copy.

I got some questions on the internet. There are some of you who are here and were told you can ask questions, and I wanna leave a little time for that. I'm only gonna answer one of the questions that came in that hasn't already been addressed in the talk. And it's an obvious question from an obvious source.

A Seventh-day Adventist inquired if I keep the Sabbath. So, that cuts right to the rub, doesn't it? The answer is: Yes, I keep the Sabbath. But let me explain to you why I do keep the Sabbath as I do.

In the Creation, God had a plan for six days of labor and one day of rest, and that one day of rest was to be continually observed (it would later be memorialized in the Law of Moses). But on the day of rest, Adam and Eve managed to get the boot out of the Garden of Eden, and so, instead of a day of rest, they were laboring. The reckoning of the week was disturbed by the fact that we lost the first one—and the calendar resulted in a day's disparity from the fall of Adam and Eve. When Christ was resurrected, He was resurrected, instead (it's called) the "first day of the week," because it was the first day of the week reckoned according to the fall of Adam. But Christ's atonement was intended to **fix the fall of Adam**, to put everything back right again, to repair the damage that had been done. And therefore, when Christ was resurrected, His resurrection coming (as it was) one day late was actually just on time, and He repaired not only the damage done in the original Fall, He repaired the Sabbath as well. Hence the observance of the day of Resurrection as the day of rest—called the first day of the week instead of the seventh because that's how time had been reckoned from the fall of Adam until the resurrection of Christ.

I observe the Sabbath as the day on which Christ was resurrected, as a symbol of his repair of the premature Fall and the loss of the **original** day of rest, going back to the time of Adam and Eve. But yes, I keep the Sabbath.

Now having said that, the original Christians would let you worship on Saturday and would let me worship on Sunday, because as long as you keep the doctrine of Christ and you accept the law of Christ, we'll figure it out together over time, and eventually, one will

¹⁶ Snuffer, Denver. *A Man Without Doubt*. Salt Lake City: Mill Creek Press, 2016

persuade the other—not, perhaps, by argument and debate, but by the quiet example that persuades the heart that there’s something more to be preferred in one than in the other.

Before asking you if you have any questions, we have fourteen minutes before we have to wrap this up because we need to vacate this entire place on time, as I mentioned when we began.

Let me end by saying that I do believe in the potential for the unity of Christians coming together in one faith. I suspect that, sitting here in this room, if every one of you were asked, “Are you a Christian?” every one of you would respond, “Yes.” And I suspect if I asked you to explain what denomination you were that probably every one but you would tell you what’s wrong with your particular version of Christianity. I don’t think the measure of your Christianity is determined by whether or not I want to judge, condemn, dismiss, belittle, complain about your version. The authenticity of your Christianity is reckoned in your heart and in your relationship with God, and if that’s authentic and if that’s sincere, how dare anyone question that! If I think I know more than you, and I have a better view of Jesus Christ and His atonement than do you, then I ought to assume the burden of persuading you. I ought to meekly tell you why you ought to have greater faith in something else. But to demand and to insist and to belittle and to complain—quite frankly, that’s exactly where early Christianity wound up when Christians were killing Christians because of doctrinal disputes. What kind of nonsense is that? Let’s not go there. Let’s accept one another as Christians if any one of us says that they are a Christian. And then, if you think you can improve their understanding, have at it. But let’s not dismiss, belittle, or discard.

Question and Answer Session

Do we have a microphone for people that are gonna, well, I’m assuming someone wants to ask questions. Oh, yeah! Does anyone wanna ask a question, ‘cause we can always end eleven minutes early.

[Muffled audience question]

Yeah, you wanna hand him the microphone? The purpose of the microphone is so people that are listening on the internet can hear it.

Question #1: You spoke about a sign. That’s kind of cryptic, but I think you can probably recall it: when the seed of the woman was born, the Lion of Judah returns, and something about “a new star will appear,” and they’ll be people that are troubled. Do I get the gist of it?

Denver: Yes, you’ve got the gist of it.

Question #1 (continued): Can you expound on it?

Denver: Well, the answer is: I could expound, but let me tell you, let me give you some background about that.

For those of you who don't know what he's talking about, I have written up a description of a future event that's going to take place, that I was inspired to write up.¹⁷ But like what happens very often with things that are given to people by God, God tells you what to say and limits what you say about some things for purposes that He may understand a whole lot better than do we. You can read John's Book of Revelation or Isaiah or Daniel or Ezekiel, and the debates about the content and the meaning of those more obscure passages are endless. And at the end of all the debate, what you wind up with is more confusion than understanding.

The way in which prophecies are handed to mankind by God is in a way that allows us (when the event takes place) to say, as Isaiah explained, "God knows the end from the beginning." Nothing's going to happen that surprises God, but the description that's given is not intended to tell us beforehand where to put our money in the stock market and when to sell, and when to get out of stocks and bonds and when to get into real estate, or when to buy gold because it's all going to crap. And the purpose is to, once an event occurs, it is to ratify God's foreknowledge. It is to confirm to us that God knew what was going to happen.

Sometimes the way that God tells us that is by giving a specific date for an event, but if He gives you a specific date for an event, the description of the event will be such that you won't understand what the event is going to be until the date arrives. Alternatively, He can give you a reasonable description of the event but no date, and so, sometimes you wait generations—millennia—for prophecies to be... I mean, Isaiah was 725 B.C., and much of what Isaiah wrote about is happening now.

So, what I wrote was what I was told to write and confined to what was intended to be conveyed. And despite what some people may think, I try to be exact, obedient, and to take no step to the left, no step to the right, no step forward unless I receive instruction from God. The only reason I'm here giving this talk is because this was something God wanted to have take place.

So yes, I could tell you a lot more, but what I've written is what I was told to write, and therefore, when it happens, you'll say, Oh yeah, God knew about that beforehand and gave a pretty good description now that I see what it involved.

¹⁷ "When the Seed of the Woman was born, a new star appeared in the heavens. In like manner, when the Lion of Judah returns, as with his first coming, there will be a new star seen. All the world will note its appearance and shall be troubled at its meaning. When it makes its appearance, you may know His return is soon upon the world. You may also know by that sign that He has given to me the words I have faithfully taught as His servant." Snuffer, Denver C., Jr. (2013, March 3). A Sign. www.denversnuffer.com.

Anyone else got a...?

Question #2: In the talk you gave in California, you referenced Matthew 24 and the signs of the last days—and that the signs have begun and that it'll all get wrapped up within one generation. Would you be able to shine more light on the vague description of “one generation”?

Denver: Ha! See, yeah? There've probably been as many Bible commentaries written on the definition of “generation” as... One offered definition of generation is “while the teaching/religion/movement remains in an unaltered state.” Almost invariably, however, the way a new revelation from Heaven works is that God will reveal Himself in a generation, and then when the prophet/prophets of that time—the mortals living, the messengers—die, what survives cannot be kept intact. It simply cannot be kept intact. You need another Peter, you need another Paul, you need another Moses, you need another one with that standing, or it falls into immediate disrepair. So, while there are living oracles that are in communication with God, that's the best definition of a generation.

But you don't “add on” to the work of a prophet. It goes downhill. From the death of Moses until the coming of John the Baptist, the only interruptions you get were when these singular men—Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel—came upon the scene, and their work was confined to them in that spot. It's... You don't “improve upon” what God gives. When God gives something, it is living, and it is breathing. It is like a fire that has been lit, and it exists until the flame goes out. But when the visions of heaven are gone because the recipient is no longer on the stage... It's what happened with the death of Joseph Smith.

Now, I use his name here, and I say that I accept him as an authentic prophet. You've got probably an image in your mind that's derived from those elders knocking on your door.¹⁸ And that image I would hope to correct (if you take the book, and you read it). Joseph Smith was a very deep Christian thinker who confronted imprisonment because of betrayal by his own followers. He confronted the inability to convey the miraculous from himself to someone else, even though the someone else's were sincere believers. He did everything he could to try and bring them along, and they failed. Instead of saying, Woe is me, he backed up and attempted a project of educating them and bringing them along. And his writings are in the book, and an introduction is in the book. But time and time again, he was confronted by authentic Christian dilemmas just like our Savior was. I hope it's an interesting book. They are for free if anyone wants to read it.

And we are out of time, so we're gonna need to end. Thank you for coming. This is the second in three talks. There's a third one that will be given in Atlanta. That one, like this

¹⁸ Male LDS missionaries

one, will be streamed live on the internet, so if you go to the website,¹⁹ you'll be able to watch the Atlanta talk when it's given. All of them are being recorded, and all of them will be available to watch again afterwards.

(And I assume that when I hit the microphone, you guys can work the volume levels to get rid of that, because they're magicians.)

Thank you for coming. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

¹⁹ *Christian Lecture #3* Atlanta, Georgia – November 16, 2017 LearnofChrist.org