

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #60:
MORMONISM’S SEVENTEEN MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH
By John Temples

NOTE: The following is the text of an article that I had published in May 2, 1985 issue of the *Gospel Advocate*. During the 1980s and 1990s, I spent 16 years preaching in Utah, in Logan (two years) and Price (14 years). Those were good years. I had many happy social interactions and studies with Mormons (or Latter-day Saints, as they prefer to be called). Unlike many denominational members, LDS people **love** to talk religion and the Bible! I’m reprinting this article to better equip Christians who might be studying with Mormons, and also in hopes that if any LDS folks read it, they might be helped to see the truth. I’ve made some minor editorial changes in the 1985 article text for clarity and consistency of punctuation. --John Temples

MORMONISM’S SEVENTEEN MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH:
A REPLY
By John Temples

During a recent study with a Mormon, I was given a list of “seventeen marks of the true church.” The idea, of course, was that only the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” meets the seventeen-point test. I wrote a reply to the seventeen points. Mormon missionaries are probably using this list of points in their evangelism efforts. Therefore, my reply might be useful to *Gospel Advocate* readers. Here are the seventeen points (in bold text) and my answer to each one:

Christ organized the church (Ephesians 4:11-14). We agree. See also Matthew 16:18. If a church is founded on some man or human creed, it is not the church Christ built. But if we follow the New Testament pattern without adding or subtracting anything, we would be by definition the same church that Christ organized. On that basis, present-day churches of Christ claim to be organized by Christ.

The true church must bear the name of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 5:23). We do bear His name. See also Romans 16:16--"The churches of Christ salute you." The term "of Latter-day Saints," however, is an *addition* to the simple New Testament name, and makes it seem that the church belongs to the saints as much as it does to Christ. But it isn't the saints' church--it belongs to Christ alone.

The true church must have a foundation of apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:19,20). We agree. But note that the verse says, "of *the* apostles and prophets"--specific ones, the ones in the first century. Since we follow the writings of these apostles and prophets, we are built on them as a foundation.

The true church must have the same organization as Christ's church (Ephesians 4:11-14). The list in Ephesians 4:11-14 is limited and qualified by the expression "till we all come to the unity of the faith." We believe that means until the completion of the revelation of the gospel. ("The faith" is equivalent to "the gospel"--see Galatians 1:23 and Acts 6:7.) The miraculous offices (apostles and prophets) ceased when the Bible was completed. The other offices (pastors or elders, evangelists, and teachers) continued because each local congregation needs them. Note that apostles and prophets were selected by the Lord, not by the church; but that elders, deacons, and evangelists are selected by the churches according to definite qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Present-day churches of Christ have elders, deacons, and evangelists.

The true church must claim divine authority (Hebrews 5:4-10). I fail to see what the passage cited has to do with church authority. It speaks of Christ's authority, given Him by God. But the church does have divine authority for what it teaches and practices, in the Bible. If churches go beyond what the Bible authorizes, they have no authority (2 John 9). The churches of Christ seek to "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent."

The true church must have no paid ministry (Isaiah 45:13, 1 Peter 5:2). The passage in Isaiah is speaking of Cyrus, God's anointed (see verse 1ff.). It has absolutely nothing to do with the New Testament church. 1 Peter 5:2 is a warning to elders not to abuse their position for monetary advantage. Note that it

condemns *dishonest* gain (“filthy lucre”), not gain *per se*. It is obvious that preachers in the New Testament church were supported financially. Paul said, “I robbed other churches, *taking wages* of them to do you service” (2 Corinthians 11:8). 1 Corinthians 9 discusses at length the principle that preachers have a right to accept or reject wages from the churches with which they labor. Verse 14 plainly says, “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”

The true church must baptize by immersion (Matthew 3:13-16, Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 2:12). We do. And it must be for remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

The true church must bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17, Hebrews 6:1,2). Neither of these passages speaks of *the church’s* bestowing this gift. In Acts 8, two *apostles* did it. How come no instructions are ever given in the Bible to the churches as to how to do it?

The true church must practice divine healing (Mark 3:14,15). Why keep citing passages that have nothing to do with the church? In Mark 3, the church was not yet in existence. Only the twelve were said to have had this power. And why single out healing? The apostles also cast out demons. Does the Mormon church claim this? It is true that later, the gift of healing was widespread in the church; but that gift, like all the others, was for the purpose of confirming the word as it was revealed (Mark 16:20). *All* the miraculous gifts ceased when the Scriptures were completed (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). If any church today has the power of divine (miraculous) healing, it should demonstrate it by doing healings of the same nature as those of Christ and the apostles. Also, that church would have all the other miraculous gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

The true church must teach that God and Jesus Christ have bodies of flesh and bone (Luke 24:36-39, Acts 1:9-11). If so, then Luke 24:39 is in direct conflict with John 4:24 (“God is a Spirit”, and the Book of Mormon contradicts Doctrine and Covenants. (Alma 22:9,10 in the Book of Mormon says that God is “that Great Spirit”; Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 says “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.”) Of course, Jesus was flesh and

bone when He lived on earth as a man; but He took on that form (Philippians 2:7), which was different from the form of God He possessed in heaven (Philippians 2:6).

The true church must teach that God and Christ are separate and distinct individuals (John 17:11, 20:17). We agree, with the qualification that the Father and the Son, along with the Holy Spirit, possess the same one divine essence or Godhead (Colossians 2:9), and are therefore the One God of Deuteronomy 6:4.

The officers [of the true church] must be called of God (Hebrews 5:4; Exodus 28:1, 40:13-16). It amazes me how passages are continually cited which have no relationship to the New Testament church! Exodus 28 and 40 have to do with the selection of Aaron as High Priest under the old Jewish system. That priesthood has been changed (Hebrews 7:12, 9:11-15). Hebrews 5:4 is also quoted out of context. It applies to Christ, as the following verses show. How are officers of the New Testament church called and appointed? By desiring the office (1 Timothy 3:1), meeting the qualifications set forth in Scripture, and then being recognized by the church as officers.

The true church must claim revelation from God (Amos 3:7). We do claim divine revelation--it is all written down and confirmed in the New Testament. The Scriptures we already have completely furnish us to every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17). All Amos 3:7 means is that in revealing His law to the people in Bible times, God always used prophets or inspired spokesmen. That we heartily believe. But since His law has now been completely revealed (Jude 3), prophets are no longer needed. (The Roman Catholic church also claims continuing revelation from God--does that make it the true church?)

The true church must be a missionary church (Matthew 28:18-20). We agree, and seek to practice what it says to the best of our ability.

The true church must be a restored church (Acts 3:19,20; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). We agree that the true church experienced apostasy, that Catholicism and Protestantism are wrong, and that a restoration was needed. In the early 19th century, godly men and women threw away their denominational names and

creeds, followed the New Testament pattern in organizing churches, and became Christians only. The churches of Christ today are the result of that restoration.

The true church must practice baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:16,29).

Whatever baptism for the dead was, it was not something true Christians did; because Paul in verses 12, 14, 17, 30 and others speaks of “you,” “your,” “us,” and “we”--but in verse 29, he says, “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead?” How come there are no instructions to the church on how to do it? Where is an actual, single example of a New Testament church practicing it? Baptism for the dead is simply not part of Christianity.

By their fruits ye shall know them (Matthew 7:20). We agree. If a church is organized according to the New Testament, and teaches the doctrine of Christ without changes or additions, with its members humbly seeking God’s grace in their lives, then that church is by definition the church of Christ. What about those who add to, delete from, and change the words of the Bible prophets? Can a “living prophet” contradict a dead prophet? If he does, can that system possibly be the church of Christ? --John Temples, Logan, Utah