

Podcast Episode 62: Every Word, Part 1

QUESTION: Some people believe that re-baptism, receiving the new Covenant, and so forth are not necessary for them because of their bloodlines, race, previous ordination or religion, affiliation with a tribe of Israel, etc. Some believe that they do not need to obey all of the ten commandments or other teachings of Christ or that some parts of the restoration, now underway, are not necessary for them to accept or live by. Are there some parts that don't apply to some people, or must every person accept every part of what is now being offered, in order to be right with God?

DENVER: The specific question here, which is a long question, comprehends an issue—and it's more the issue I want to address, than it is the lengthy question. Problems present themselves when there are those who are participants in a fellowship or have aligned themselves with people that are trying to faithfully worship and continue the process of the restoration, and among the group of people there are those who think that parts of what one person believes is not essential or important, or they outright reject the other portion of what's going on. Here's the purpose of the restoration: It is to return and reestablish on earth, again, a religion that existed and was taught to Adam in the first generation. The purpose is not to create a New Testament church. It's not to revive and revitalize Judaism. All of the Judeo-Christian religions are relics, and they are incomplete relics. They are not what existed before.

When Moses went up on the mount to meet with God and receive from him an initial revelation, he came down from the mount bringing with him a more fulsome restoration than what the children of Israel were willing to receive at that time. And so, the initial revelation to Moses got destroyed, and it was replaced by something else. That “something else” was intended to point to the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah was symbolized in every one of the rites of the law of Moses—from the Passover that occurred before the law of Moses right down to all of the observances in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, where you are making specific sacrifices for specific problems. Each one of those involved a covenantal representation, type, and shadow of a Messiah that would come to offer a sacrifice that would count. It's like the apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrews, trying to get it through their tradition, that the shedding of the blood of oxen and sheep and rams—that shedding of blood by these things cannot remove anyone's sin. They're simply pointing to something—some sacrifice—that actually could remove people's sin. And then he testifies to the Hebrews, in that letter, that that great sacrifice was Jesus Christ, whom they rejected. It was expected that they would reject Him. The chief cornerstone would be set at naught. Just like it's expected that the Gentiles will reject the fullness of the gospel, it was expected

that the Jews would reject the Messiah. And so, the fact that someone thinks that there is a religion they would like to participate in, short of the fulsome restoration of the religion that goes back to the time of Adam—they are really behaving like the Jews (who rejected the Messiah) or the Gentiles (who rejected the fulness of the Restoration). What they're saying is, We will go thus far but no further. And, therefore, they're really not interested in the work that God is attempting to complete.

When Christ said, Thou shalt *live by every word which proceedeth forth [from] the mouth of God* (D&C 98:11; see also T&C 82:18), He wasn't talking merely about whatever the canon of scripture was in their day; He wasn't talking about His own sermons. He was talking about the work that God has to do. That work, in every generation, has remained incomplete, from the days of Adam until now. It's still incomplete. That doesn't mean that you can't pick up the Old Testament and find a way that is enriching and, perhaps, even deeply satisfying in worshiping God through what you learn in the Old Testament. It doesn't mean that you can't take both the Old Testament and the New Testament and find a[n] empowering, rewarding, richly edifying religion in accepting that. It also doesn't mean that you can't be someone that accepts the Book of Mormon, in addition to all of the foregoing— you can find yourself a satisfying, delightful religion by being a Latter-day Saint, by being a member of the Community of Christ. Any number of religions can give to you something that's satisfying. The purpose that is underway right now, however, is to do what Christ admonished be done; that is, *to live by every word that proceedeth forth [from] the mouth of God*.

We cannot see the fulfillment of the covenants and the promises that were given in the prophecies without [*living*] *by every word that proceedeth forth [from] the mouth of God* today. There is an enormous amount of work to be done. You can have your individual religious connection with God, but you are not aligning yourselves with the complete restoration that was interrupted by the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. There's work left to be done. Part of the work of rebuilding the restoration—and remembering and honoring what went before—was an act of penitence; an act of group repentance; an act of sincere, devoted, deliberate confession of the failure, acknowledging the failure, preliminary to the act of repenting and returning and recovering. That is an effort that—

An individual can always repent of their sins. But God wants a **people** to repent, **as a people**, of their sins. Covenants don't get given out, generally, one-on-one with God when He is trying to create a people. Covenants get given out to **people**. The purpose of the extending of the Covenant in Boise was God acknowledging and recognizing this confession of the sins, the confession of the failure, the desire to repent and return. And what we had in the record, in the scriptures, had been altered, had been corrupted, had been

manipulated—just like the New Testament canon underwent alterations during the third and fourth century. And the Christological debates of the third and fourth century, in order for one side to win their argument about the nature of Jesus Christ, they changed the content of the New Testament, so that the New Testament supported their view of Jesus Christ. Like that, there were those in the early days of Mormonism who felt that they had the right to make sure that revelations through Joseph Smith conformed to their view of what they thought would be the right way.

And so changes and alterations and insertions got made, not only into scripture, but also into historical documents. Letters were changed; journal entries were changed; duplicate journals were put together, in order to replace journals that did not corroborate. And so, that the corruption that happened in the New Testament era has been mirrored in the Restoration through Joseph Smith in our era.

All the world's religions, basically, are created in a single generation. Between Moses and Joshua and Caleb and Aaron, Judaism was created in one generation. Now, some things got added later through subsequent prophets, but the root of that religion was in one generation. Christianity got created in a single generation that included Zacharias and John and Jesus and Peter and the twelve and Paul—and then Barnabas and a few outliers. But a single generation created Christianity. In Islam, you have Muhammad, and you have Omar, and you have the creation of the Islamic text in a single generation.

And every one of them underwent issues of others meddling in the content of what had been delivered in that single generation. In the case of Moses, that took a form (just prior to the Babylonian captivity) that was—it had become violent. The disagreements of the Deuteronomists with the Traditionalists had become violent, at that point. It was the threat of violence by the Revisionists (the folks that wanted to change the view of the Messiah) that drove Lehi and his family out of Jerusalem. And so that Lehi party preserves a tradition that is really the old religion in the Book of Mormon. In the New Testament, the texts of the New Testament—

One of the researchers who's done a very good job of laying out the problem is Bart Ehrman. He wrote—I know the main title of the book—it's *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*: —And then what follows the colon, I can paraphrase; I can get pretty close; *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: How the [The Effect of Early] Christological Debates [Controversies] of the Third and Fourth Century altered the Christian Canon [on the Text of the New Testament]*. That's pretty close: Bart Ehrman, E-H-R-M-A-N. He was, one time, a believing, Christian theologian. He is now agnostic. He's lost his faith because his deep look

into how the Christian canon was developed and altered affected his ability to trust the canon itself.

One example of alteration that you can see from the Deuteronomist era is that the sacrifice of Isaac (in the canon that we have) did not get completed. Isaac was not actually killed, but the ram was found in the thicket that saved his sacrifice. There was another tradition that Isaac actually was killed, and that he was able to be brought back to life. That older tradition—that involved the killing of Isaac and him making it back to life—is preserved in the Book of Mormon, and it's also preserved in Paul's letter to the Hebrews, in which he mentions that Abraham proceeded with what he did because he believed that God was able to bring Isaac back to life. And that tradition got altered, in part, by the Deuteronomists.

Well, there is— what is it? Where that the statement is made that *Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee* (Psalm 2:7; see also Psalm 2:2 RE)? That statement was Messianic and prophetic, and it was, at one point, in some—if not all—of the gospel accounts. At the baptism of Jesus Christ, the statement quoted from Psalms appears there, *Thou art my Son this day have I begotten thee*. That statement is also used by Paul in the letter to the Hebrews, as posing the question, *Unto [whom has God said], Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?* (Hebrews 1:5; see also Hebrews 1:2 RE). Meaning, he's arguing that the Hebrews ought to believe in Jesus Christ, because that's what heaven did for Jesus Christ.

During the Christological debates, there was a group of people who denied that Christ was conceived miraculously to a virgin mother, by God's intervention to create the pregnancy that resulted in the divine birth of Christ. They contended that Jesus was just an ordinary guy—like any other guy—and that there was no difference between Him and the man on the street. However, the destiny of Jesus changed, and His status altered when, at the time of His baptism, He was told, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, at which point He became adopted into God's family and the Son of God.

And so the adoptionists (that's what they called themselves) interpreted the statement in scripture, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee* to mean that Jesus was just a chap, like any other chap out there, and on the day of His baptism, God adopted Him, and that's how He became the Messiah. Whereas others said, No, there's this other material we have to respect—He wasn't like you and me; He was divinely conceived by a virgin mother, and He fulfilled a lot of prophecy in the process of coming into this world.

And Bart Ehrman, in his book, shows how some of the ante-Nicene (the A-N-T-E—the “before” Nicene) fathers—the early Christian fathers, in the generation that followed the Apostles, up til the Council of Nicea, 324 [AD]—how many of those writers referred to the

baptism of Jesus and, in fact, quoted the words differently than, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. They quoted the words, instead, to be *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*. Ehrman argued that this is one of many clear-cut examples of how the text got altered, in part because they were debating a doctrinal issue of how to understand Jesus Christ. Bart Ehrman has done great work with that.

In the case of the Islamic canon, there are those—generally, it's the consensus—some will disagree that Muhammad himself did not read or write; that he was functionally illiterate, in the sense that he didn't compose the text of the book of the Quran. Instead, he memorized it; he recited it. And that the correct way to perpetuate the Islamic tradition is by recitation and memorization. In fact, people use memorization as an act of devotion within the Islamic faith, in order to prove that you can, in fact, perpetuate the entirety of the text, intact, through an oral tradition. Omar reduced it to writing; the writing got preserved. But as happens with any written record in its preservation, there were different versions of the Quran that existed for a period of time.

But Islam has embedded within it the possibility that if there is a religious disagreement about something that is considered sacred, then violence can be employed in order to establish the correct view. Because you can denounce, and even kill, a heresy and heretics.

That culminated, after a couple of hundred years in Islam, with various versions of the Quran floating around, in a purge—in which different versions, belonging to weaker believers— numerically weaker, militarily weaker—got conquered, and the text got burned. And so we have a version of the Quran today that's considered Orthodox, because they managed to destroy competing versions of what was out there. There are still Islamic scholars that recognize that there are some parts of the Quran that may suitably read differently than they do today, whether they believe themselves Orthodox, Heterodox, or heretical, that's something that those that believe in the faith would have to figure out. But they had the same kind of problem.

I think anyone who is interested in understanding how a religion—any religion—came about should study Mormonism. Because Mormonism has available, in real-time, the exact same process and phenomenon that happened in every one of the world's great religions. (I left out Buddhism, but the same thing would be applicable to Buddhism; the same thing would be applicable to Hinduism—although when you get to the Vedas, you're going so far back into history, there are debates about over how long a period of time some of those were developed.) But all religions share similarly. They get founded, for the most part, [in a] single generation. Then they go through a metamorphosis process, in which you're trying to get it into a stable form that can be perpetuated. That initial period (between founding

and assuming a stable form), involves a whole lot of textual manipulation, textual destruction, competing arguments. Arrogant people—who think they have something valuable to contribute—will insert themselves into the process. Sincere people—who may be meek and humble in their own right but who devoutly, earnestly believe that something's wrong—will use that conviction, that heart-felt conviction, that the wrong thing needs to be fixed, to go out and make their own changes to what's going on, out of the goodness of their heart. It doesn't mean that they're vile people; it just means that this is what people do.

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