

# Mormonism 07

by Gordon Fraser

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*This sermon explores the historical background and unique claims of Mormonism, examining its relationship to the Restoration Movement and the biblical definition of the church.*

**Duration:** 40:58

**Scripture:** Hebrews 1:1

**Topics:** "Christian Doctrine", "Jesus Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes two main points: Jesus Christ as the Savior and the Bible as the only rule of life. He highlights the simplicity of this formula and praises the brilliance and character of a scholar who revised the English Bible. The preacher argues that Christians are not obligated to keep the moral law as it has been abolished by Jesus. He also discusses the concept of a Melchizedek priesthood in heaven, represented by Jesus, who will never die. The sermon emphasizes the importance of the church and its responsibility to maintain its testimony of Jesus Christ through the rule of elders.

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## Transcript

The historic background of the movement that is known in Church history is the Restoration Movement, which dates from about 1810 on down through the succeeding two or three decades. And there were some very interesting people involved in it, and among them was the beginnings of the Church of the Latter-day Saints. The time period is very interesting because it was at a time when there was a great deal of unrest in religious circles.

The Revolutionary War terminated the Church-state idea of the Puritans and all of those who had been the leaders of the religious groups in New England. With the Revolution, of course, the Church-state idea was terminated. Following that, and in fact notably after the War of 1812, there was a moving westward of pioneers.

Many of them were bankrupted by the two wars, and they were looking for new territory in the West, which was a very normal trend and has occurred a number of times in our history. But by the time of the War of 1812, there had been a readjustment of religious alliances. The Presbyterian Church emerged from the Puritan work of New England and was probably the most forceful of any of the groups in that period.

The Anglican Church, of course, became the Episcopal Church, and it suffered greatly during that period as far as advance was concerned. The Wesleyans bear it in mind that John Wesley had just died two or

three decades before this, and the Methodist movement was in its beginning and was taking hold and was probably one of the most vital of all of the groups that emerged. And we want to remember, too, that many of the churches in America had ethnic backgrounds.

Luperns came out of northern Europe and Germany, and Moravians and Mennonites came out of Germany and Westphalia and southern Russia, and many of these migrated to America. The person, Count Ludwig von Zindendorf, whose hymns we have in our hymnals, most of them, there's usually one or two of his hymns in practically every hymnal. He was one who followed the Moravian brethren from Germany.

In fact, it was on his estate in Germany that the Moravians retreated to when they were ousted from Bohemia. There's a long train of events there of finding a new country and settling. So, we have in the East, we have many ethnic groups, and each one followed the line of their predecessors in the Old World, which made for a degree of confusion.

But many of them emerged into solid church groups, and their history can be traced down from the present time. Now, at that time, there was also a great deal of unrest in the thinking of the general population. The humanism of Europe that developed during the 18th century, starting with some elements of it in the 17th century, mostly in the 18th century, with the humanists who had the concept that man was self-improvable.

This is the basic idea of humanism. Man can achieve, which, of course, is an old idea that has been revived many times down in the history of philosophy and religion. One period in China, 600 B.C., Confucius, or Hongfu Si, was the man who had the idea of humanism.

A contemporary of his, Lao Tzu, had the concept of theism. He was a devout theist who lived at the same time as Confucius. Well, they were arguing over this point 600 B.C. Confucius is known today as the great philosopher of China.

He was a humanist philosopher. He had the thought that if people would just improve themselves, they could achieve the perfect state. This was his concept.

Well, coming down into Europe of the 18th century and 19th century, 18th century and 17th century, Descartes and Montaigne, Rousseau, and several of the men of that type. There was Hume and Voltaire, as I remember. And this, their god, they postulated their god as, it was named as deism.

God had started the universe going, and then went away and left it. This was the concept, incidentally, that was carried over from the European philosophers to our own country when Montaigne and Thomas Jefferson took up their argument. They were decided humanists.

Mr. Jefferson deleted everything from his Bible that had to do with the miracles. He couldn't accept the miracles. Well, this ferment, or this virus, you might say, was going through all of what we would call the unchurched people of that period.

Many of them knew the Bible, and they would quote it very freely. Even in the saloons and on the street and so forth, they could all quote from the Bible. And most of them ridiculed it.

This was certainly the case with Montaigne and Thomas Jefferson. As I said, he deleted everything that was of a miraculous character. But by the time of the period immediately after the War of 1812, there were

certain figures that came into prominence.

Two of them were Scottish Presbyterians who came to this country, Thomas and Alexander POUND. They were the men who came from the Scottish church, and they came to this country and tried to align themselves with the Cedar Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania and Kentucky and so forth. But they found there were many things that weren't right.

And so these two men decided that it was time for a restoration. They said the church must be restored. Campbell came forth with this premise.

Only two points need we consider. Jesus Christ as the Savior and the Bible as the only rule of life. No head but Christ.

No book but the Bible. It was a very simple formula. He was a very brilliant man, incidentally.

He was a scholar in the ancient languages and did a very acceptable revision of the English Bible. His time compares very favorably with some of the more modern revisions. So he was a man of real character and real quality.

Unfortunately, the folks that aligned themselves with him accepted this simple formula. No creed but Christ. No book but the Bible.

Then, of course, he, being a Presbyterian from Scotland, felt that baptism by immersion was necessary. That this was the symbol of the Christian faith. And that without it, a person really wasn't completely converted.

Now, he preached this for a period of 15 years before the present churches of Christ came into existence. But he was the one who founded this particular line of thought and these churches, which are now represented in three different branches. The Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, and the Christian Church.

All of them who follow Alexander Campbell as their mentor. Well, at the same time, there were those who aligned themselves with Alexander Campbell who finally disagreed with him. One of them was a man by the name of Sidney Rigdon.

Sidney Rigdon had preached with Alexander Campbell for a period of about 10 years, preaching the Restoration Gospel, as they called it. The Restored Church. Now, Sidney Rigdon was not a regenerate man.

He says in his formula, the doctrine, this is why they finally excommunicated him from the church. These are some of his points. Christians are not under obligation to keep the moral law, it having been abolished by the Savior.

Then, a change of heart consists merely in a change of views and baptism. There is no such thing as a religious experience. The saving faith is a mere crediting of the testimony given by the evangelists, such as all men have in the truth of any history, and so forth.

This is quoted from the letter of excommunication that he received from Alexander Campbell and his group. Well, this was in 1821. Now, there had been a group in western Vermont, southwestern Vermont, in Rutland County.

A sort of a charismatic movement developed at that point, and included in that group of people This dates from 1790 to 1805, approximately this period of time, or a little before this. Included in this group was this man, Sidney Rigdon, and a man by the name of Cowdery, of which Oliver Cowdery is one that we take into consideration tonight, and a family by the name of Whitmer, and Brigham Young came from that same group, the same area, and these people eventually all migrated over into New York State. Sidney Rigdon had the circuit, his preaching circuit, was from Rutland County, New York, across to Albany, and across the route of the Erie Canal, which was in building at that time, past Palmyra, New York, where the Mormon development occurred.

This was his preaching ground for a period of ten years. Finally, he ended up in eastern Ohio, at Hurland, Ohio, and had a church at that place of his particular group. This was the church that was excluded by Alexander Campbell, with Sidney Rigdon at his head.

They were excommunicated, and very soon after this, joined in full force into the Mormon church, which was developing at that time. So, Alexander Campbell was the one who fostered the Restoration Movement. Sidney Rigdon was with him and preached this, but was excluded.

Sidney Rigdon immediately went over towards Palmyra and became acquainted with the Smith family, although he stayed in the background for quite a few years until the work was started. But this group from Vermont were of the group that belonged to no church. They had Bibles.

Everybody had Bibles, or at least every family had a Bible. But they merely read it, and they knew the text of the scripture, but they didn't know the meaning of it. Sidney Rigdon, with him in the background, not visible until a year after the Book of Mormon was finished, when he put in his appearance for the first time as a public figure.

Now, the group that developed the Mormon church, there were six of them that organized the church in April of 1830. The church was founded at the home of Peter Whitmer in a nearby town. David Whitmer is the most prominent name among the Whitmers that we find in the history.

But the church was founded with six people, of which, of course, Joseph Smith was one. David Whitmer was one of them. Oliver Cowdery was one of them, and so forth.

But there were about eight or nine people that came into prominence almost immediately. There was Martin Harris, a man who was a rather well-to-do farmer in the Palmyra area, and Brigham Young, who came about two years after, about 1832. He was of this group.

He had been a Methodist. And all of them expressed exactly the same idea, that the church must be restored, that there is no church on earth that administers baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. This was their one big plea, which, of course, was not true because there were a number of churches that did.

But this was the cry. We need a restored church. It was already functioning under Alexander Campbell, for that matter, as the Restoration.

They didn't mean revival or renewal or reformation. They said it must be a new thing, an absolutely new church. And they came forward with the argument that the real church of Jesus Christ had disappeared soon after the Twelve Apostles died, that the church was not in existence for a period of 1,700 years, that the church was not there.

Now, James Talmadge, in his scriptural and secular history, pages 18 and 19, makes this statement. He says, We affirm that with the passing of the so-called apostolic age, the church gradually drifted into a condition of apostasy whereby succession in the priesthood was broken. Notice that point.

Succession in the priesthood was broken, and that the church, as an earthly organization operating under divine direction and having authority to officiate in spiritual ordinances, ceased to exist. If, therefore, the church of Christ is to be found upon the earth today, it must have been re-established by divine authority, and the holy priesthood must have been restored to the world from which it was lost by the apostasy of the primitive church. Now, this is an important statement because we want to examine it and see if this actually was so.

Now, just a few weeks ago, I copied a couple of statements from a book in the Los Angeles Library, The Kingdom of God Restored, published by Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, 1955. I hadn't seen it before. Carter Eldridge Grant, whom I presume was of the Grant family that was very prominent in the Mormon church.

He says this in Volume 1, page 79, "...the new organization is not a Protestant church. The Lord declares by revelation that it is the actual restoration of God's kingdom, that it possesses the keys of heaven revealed by the Father and the Son and the holy angels, even the church of Jesus Christ restored among men." Now, that's a pretty severe statement. He goes on to say, "...the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today, who have received a divine witness that Joseph Smith is a prophet, have experienced the vibrant feelings that those organizers as the 24-year-old prophet arose.

President Wilford Woodruff states that upon such important occasions, the prophet's face shone like amber. Joseph Smith alone knew the way. He held every key, every power, and every gift that was necessary for the restoring of the kingdom of God in His fullness." Now, some of you will be surprised that the kingdom of God has ceased to exist and needed to be restored, and that the church had ceased to exist.

I want to examine some of these factors. Incidentally, the early Mormons did not like to be called Christians. Fr.

Brigham Young on one occasion preached a sermon in which he said, We do not want to be called Christians. We are not Christians. Don't call us Christians.

Well, he was very definite about it. Today, Mormons are saying, We are Christians. Now, of course, that's a pretty abrasive term nowadays, because we have Christian Democrats in Italy, and we have Christians and Moslems fighting each other in Lebanon, and we have two sects of Christians fighting each other in the north of Ireland, and we have Christian science and we have Jehovah's Witnesses and a lot of units that call themselves by the name of Christ or at least implying a relationship to the ones that we call the Godhead.

So, Christianity is a very loose term. Now, there was a time when it meant really something to be a Christian. Actually, today, Christianity hasn't changed.

Being a Christian is being one who has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, has experienced the new birth, and now with others meets together in fellowship, worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church. This is a Christian. Now, there are many who call themselves Christians who know nothing

about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They know nothing about an experience of salvation. But without that, a person isn't a Christian. What is the Christian church? Is it an organization? No.

It never was. This is where many people have made a vast mistake. The church is an organism composed of all of those who know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and meet together for fellowship, whether here or in any one of a hundred different distinctions.

The church of Jesus Christ is an organism. It's an organism that grows from within and reaches out to those who have not yet become Christians and brings them together in what we call a Christian fellowship. Now, these men who were foremost in the work of establishing the Mormon church, they had come together saying, The church needs to be restored.

The church is defunct. It doesn't exist. It hasn't existed since the death of the apostles.

And they were saying there is no person with authority upon the earth today to function in the Christian church as an elder, bishop, and so on. So, the group got together and they decided that the new church should have all of the offices that are mentioned in the Bible, including seers and prophets, apostles, patriarch, and so forth. All of these offices.

Well, they did this. They organized an organization, and today the Mormon church is one of the most visible, let's say, of the so-called church organizations. Now, from apostolic times until the present, there has never been a time when the church was not functioning.

Not an establishment. There have been several times down through history when there have been religious establishments that took themselves the name of the church of Christ. Look through history, and we find some massive organizations.

They fell by the wayside, and in some cases were revived from within and continued on, and so we have church organizations today. But the church of Jesus Christ, in apostolic times, was an organism composed of believers who had, in many cases, had known the Lord personally, and then, of course, as the first century advanced, one by one they dropped off, and the Apostle John was probably the last one left who actually knew the Lord personally. Well, did the church cease with the death of John? Obviously not.

You say, well, how about an apostolic succession? There's no such thing in Scripture. They have manufactured an apostolic succession, particularly the Catholic Church is the one that believed in an apostolic succession, that you cannot function unless you have been ordained by someone who was capable of ordaining you, had authority from headquarters, and he in turn from his headquarters, so down through the centuries, had this thing of apostolic succession in the Roman Church. We're all aware of this.

But the Roman Church has in it many who are not saved people. There are those in Romanism, I'm sure, that are saved people, because I've met some of them. But the concept was there, that there must be an apostolic succession.

Well, according to the definition of an apostle, an apostle is one who has seen the Lord Jesus Christ personal. Paul had to defend his apostleship. He saw the Lord on the Damascus Road, and, of course, as a student in Jerusalem, in the school of Gamaliel, he probably had seen Jesus, the man, many times,

because he was there during the years that the Lord Jesus was ministering in the area.

So, the apostle Paul was one who saw the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, from that time on, there is no such thing as an apostle, by definition. Anyone who calls himself an apostle, you can ask him, Have you seen the Lord Jesus? If he says no, well, then you're not an apostle.

Now, another thing. There was no prophetic office in the New Testament Church. That was cancelled out by the statement of the writer of the book of Hebrews.

God, who at sundry times in divers manners spake in times past unto the prophets, hath in these latter days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath ordained. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ was the one that we were to listen to. In the old times, up until the time of Christ, the prophetic office was very important, and the prophets spoke in the place of God to the people of Israel.

Following that, when the Lord Jesus Christ came, he fulfilled all of the requirements of the Old Testament, and he is the one now that we listen to. So, if a prophet comes to us and says, I'm a prophet of God, you say, well, you prove it. Where did you get your authority? Now, we're saying this.

We say Joseph Smith was not a prophet. Certainly, he wasn't in the definition of a prophet, and since he came after the time that the Lord Jesus Christ revealed himself in his word, there's no place for the prophet in the church. This is not a church office.

In fact, the only church offices we have in the New Testament church, and this goes back to the time of the apostles, there were deacons and elders. There were bishops, but a bishop and an elder are the same thing. Bishop is an Anglo-Saxon term, elder is not.

But an elder was a bishop, a shepherd. That's what the term means, a shepherd. Those were the only two offices in the church.

The apostles obviously died off during the first century. John was the last of them, apparently, to succumb. All of the others except John were martyred.

John alone lived and died a natural death. But the apostleship was no longer necessary for the simple reason that the apostles were those who were sent out by the figure of Jesus Christ himself into the world to present the new gospel. And the church was well-established by the time the last of the apostles were gone.

The elders and the deacons are local functionaries. They serve in the local assembly. Now, we say the church consists of all in every fellowship who honor the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

We make no distinction there. They belong to what we might call the universal church of Jesus Christ. They're born again from above, accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Then, as they gather together in companies like this, scattered worldwide, each group has a responsibility to maintain its testimony of the Lord Jesus, and the only order is the rule of the elders. And that isn't rule, that's guidance. But the elders become elders because of their qualifications.

An elder is one who is married, he has a family, and his family is in subjection to him. Therefore, according to Paul, he has the gift or the responsibility of an elder. A deacon has the same requirements, the husband of one wife with an orderly family.

He is the actual servant of the church in physical matters. So, these are the only offices we have in the New Testament church. We don't have a priesthood, except that the Bible teaches us that we have the priesthood of all believers.

Not by ordination, but because of the fact that they can minister in spiritual things as individuals. It may be a woman talking to her neighbor, or a man talking to his employer. He's enjoying the function of a priest at that particular time.

So, there is no priesthood in the early church, and there's no priesthood today legitimately. We know that there are those who occupy the places of priests, but actually, many of them are merely ordained to that distinction without the qualifications. The elders are the same token.

There are many who are appointed as elders who have no ability to function as elders, and they haven't got the maturity to do it. So, this is the structure of the early church. This was the New Testament church.

A very simple organism functioning in a given place, and in turn, having fellowship with others of like mind. This was the church. Now, of course, as the years went on, there were those who sought prestige and honor, and they were vying with each other for holy position in the church.

But this was purely the work of the flesh in their activities. This is not in Scripture. Now, we find in Mormonism, for instance, we have a prophet, and Joseph Smith allocated to himself the position of being the prophet of Mormonism, and is accorded honor as such today.

He, in turn, was succeeded by a group of men whose names we could give to you, but it would be a tedious repetition. We have today a man by the name of Spencer Kimball, who is an oxygenarian. He is the living prophet.

They speak of the living prophet. His successor will probably appear very soon, because the old man is very ill. He's having problems.

He just came out of the hospital recently. He had fluids removed between his brain and his skull, and was really in rather delicate condition. Well, he will be succeeded by one who will consider himself the prophet.

He will be elected by the Council of the Twelve Apostles to be the prophet and the leader of the church. Well, as I say, that is an office that did not exist in the early church, and ordination as such is not a function that a person with qualifications from a higher position can place on the head of an individual. The ordination comes from the recognition of his brethren within the group, and he, in turn, functions because of the fact that he has the qualifications, he has proved himself competent, and he functions as such.

But the apostles were gone, because no one living today has seen the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the qualifications for becoming an apostle. There's no prophet, because the prophets were ruled out according to Hebrews 1.1. The prophetic office ceased with the person of Jesus Christ.

The priestly office is one in which, according to the apostle Peter, we are all priests. We're royal priests heralding forth the word of life. We are royal priests, and we are what is the word? Fully priests.

In other words, this gives us a standing in the presence of God. He recognizes us. The royal priest declares the gospel.

I had a rather interesting definition by a Navajo Indian pastor out in Arizona some years ago, a very brilliant person. He made the statement, he said, a priest is one who has access to the presence of the Lord and can go before the Lord for his people. Then, he is one who comes out to his people and declares the mind of the Lord to his people.

This is a priest, and this, of course, is a function within the church. But it isn't a sacerdotal office. It's an office that is given by reason of maturity and ability.

Now, in the Mormon church we have two priesthoods. There is an Aaronic priest and Melchizedek priest. The Aaronic priest is supposed to be a continuation of the office of Aaron, the Levites, the Levitical priesthood, which was the sacrificial order.

Their one duty was to offer the sacrifices for the people. Obviously, that function has ceased because the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament sacrifices, and so that priesthood cannot function today. If anyone says he is an Aaronic priest, you ask him when he offered his last sacrifice, because this was a sacrificial order.

They offered sacrifices for the people. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, he fulfilled all of the types of the sacrifices of the Old Testament period. The Melchizedek priesthood, on the other hand, is one that belongs to only one person, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

He is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, and he is a priest by reason of the fact that he will never die. Now, if one who calls himself a Melchizedek priest appears, ask him, Do you expect to die? And he will say, Certainly. Well, then you can't be an Melchizedek priest.

Actually, there was no priesthood of Melchizedek in the church at any time. This was not an office that was in the church. Now, according to the Mormons, James, Peter, and John occurred on a certain time and accorded the Melchizedek priesthood to those who were in the Mormon church who qualified for it.

Of course, Joseph Smith and some others. Well, James, Peter, and John had no authority to confer any order or any honor upon anyone. They were not priests.

They were not prophets. They were not priests because of the fact they were in the wrong tribe. They belonged to the tribe of Judah, and only those in the tribe of Levi could be priests of any order.

The Melchizedek priesthood is one that is purely typical of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we find that expanded very greatly in the Epistles of the Hebrews. Now, during the early period of the Mormon church, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon attempted to revise or retranslate the Bible into what is known as the Inspired Version. That isn't the total title, but that's what it's known as, and the manuscript was kept in possession by Emma Smith when Joseph Smith was assassinated, and she carried it with her to the Reorganized Church, which took place in the early 1860s with Joseph Smith III as the ruling prophet.

They published the Inspired Version, so-called. I have a copy of it, and I've gone through and noted the changes that were made. Now, the only changes that are made in that version are changes that were such that they didn't like the translation in the King James Version, so they changed it, and in the case of Hebrews, they have done some very subtle editing.

There's one verse, for instance, that speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ and his manhood, the things that he suffered, and so forth, and they have put brackets around that verse which makes it refer back to

Melchizedek, which it doesn't, but it makes it seem important. Now, there is no such thing on the earth today as a Melchizedek priesthood. Our Melchizedek priesthood is in heaven, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is by reason of the fact that he will never die.

Now, I was told to put promptly for this first session right at 15 minutes after, and it's now 15 minutes after, so let's get up and shake hands and wiggle and get ready to sit down for another 45 minutes while the tape is being changed. While it's circulating in the book table, go ahead, but we'll be back in five minutes.

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