Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend: Challenging the Claims of Latter-day Saints in a Constructive Manner*

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Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend is intended to be a tool to enable Christians to make a Mormon seriously examine his or her faith. In the introduction, several techniques are outlined to formulate a logical attack on Latter-day Saint beliefs. Hints are included on making the argument go the reader’s way, even when he or she confronts a Mormon who is able to refute the book’s claims. Here Mr. McKeever sets up a no-win test for such a Mormon. The Mormon’s answer must pass three tests, in that it is:

- biblical, i.e., the answer must be found in the Bible, or it is invalid;
- logical, i.e., the answer must conform to what McKeever believes, or it is not logical; or
- in harmony with Mormon history and teachings, i.e., what McKeever and Johnson define as Mormon teachings, based on early statements of various General Authorities (all of whom were converts to the church at that early period) in the Journal of Discourses, the Seer (a publication written by Orson Pratt and portions of which are said to have been condemned by Brigham Young and others at one time),\(^1\) and other early writings outside the standard works of the Church.

The problem with these tests is that not all Latter-day Saint doctrines are found in the Bible as it currently exists and not all statements of Latter-day Saint leaders have been accepted as

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\(^1\) See especially Orson Pratt’s confession in JD 7:374, 375; see also Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, intro., notes, and index by James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–), 2:214, 238–39; Millennial Star 17 (12 May 1855): 298; and CHC 4:61–62 n. 16.
official doctrine that is binding upon the membership of the Church. Additionally, the criticisms raised by McKeever and Johnson have logical responses, but if the authors do not like the response or if it does not fit into their doctrinal stricture, it is not logical (to them) and hence not a valid answer.

After the introduction, the contents of the book are organized around what the cover calls “fifteen effective questions”:

- If I accept you as a Christian, will you accept me as a Mormon?
- Which First Vision account should we believe?
- How do you determine doctrinal truth?
- What if the Bible is translated correctly after all?
- If the Bible is corrupt, why doesn’t the LDS Church use the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible?
- Why should a person pray about the Book of Mormon when the Bible says we should not rely on such a subjective test?
- Is it wise to place blind trust in mere mortal men?
- Why does the Mormon church ignore Jesus’ role as prophet of God’s Church?
- Is the Mormon priesthood really of ancient origin?
- Where in the Bible does it say a person has to be worthy to enter the temple?
- What historical support does the Mormon Church have to justify baptism for the dead?
- If Mormon families will be together forever, where will the in-laws live?
- Do you really believe you can become a God?
- Have you ever sinned the same sin twice?
- Are you keeping the whole law?

Let’s take a quick look at a few of the issues raised by McKeever and Johnson.

In the second chapter the authors ask, “Which First Vision account should we believe?” A number of excellent publications treat this oft-answered subject. At first glance, the quotations

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presented in this chapter would seem to be contradictory. However, if one examines the accounts in detail and reads the words within their full context, one finds quite a harmony among them. I think it would be instructive, however, for evangelicals to look critically at accounts of the first vision of Paul. A comparison of Luke’s secondhand account of Paul’s first vision in Acts 9:1–20 with Paul’s own accounts in Acts 22:4–21 and Acts 26:9–20 reveals a number of differences.

Let’s pretend for a minute that I am a first-century critic of the New Testament (using the technique favored by most present-day anti-Mormons). We find, as we read the three accounts, a steady evolution of Paul’s “blessedness,” of the sources of Paul’s calling, and of what the Lord actually said to him.

In Luke’s account, the Lord tells Paul only to go to Damascus to find out what he must do. Ananias sees a vision telling him that Paul is a chosen vessel. The scales fall off Paul’s eyes and his blindness is removed through the laying on of hands.

In the first account spoken by Paul himself (Acts 22), no mention is made of Ananias’s vision. Paul is told of his calling by Ananias (Acts 22:14–15) and then sees a second vision in Jerusalem informing him that he must teach the Gentiles (Acts 22:17–21). Ananias does not lay on hands but only stands and says, “Receive thy sight” (Acts 22:13), making this account appear a little more miraculous than the first. According to this account, Ananias is said to be “a devout man according to the law, having a good report [among] all the Jews that dwelt there” (Acts 22:12). Yet, according to Luke’s account, he is plainly identified as “a certain disciple at Damascus” (Acts 9:10, 19). How could he have a good report among the Jews if he were a Christian? Were not the Christians hated there? How can a man be devout according to the law and a Christian at the same time? Does this not conflict with evangelical doctrine that one is not truly saved if devoted to the law?

In Paul’s second account (Acts 26), instead of Jesus telling Paul to go into Damascus to find out what he must do, Jesus himself tells Paul that he is chosen and will preach to the Gentiles. No

mention is made of Anania's, of Paul's blindness, of Paul's second vision, or of Paul's baptism. Paul puts nearly one hundred words into the mouth of Jesus that are unique in this account, whereas in the other accounts Jesus only identifies him by name and tells him where to go for further instruction.

Additionally, Luke's account mentions that Saul fell, while the men who were with him were still standing. They too heard the voice, but saw nothing ("no man," in Luke's account means "to see nothing"). The account in Acts 22 says that Paul fell, while the men did not hear the voice and did see the light (interestingly, only Paul is blinded by the light). The third account (Acts 26) says that they all fell and that Paul (presumably alone) heard the voice.

The first and third accounts make mention of Jesus, who is being persecuted, while in the second account he identifies himself as Jesus of Nazareth. The first account has the phrase "it's hard to kick against the pricks" after Paul asks, "Who art thou, Lord?" The second account omits the phrase, while the third account has the phrase before Paul asks the questions. Only in the third account does Paul mention that the person in the vision spoke Hebrew to him. The others are remarkably silent about this, though this material fact better fits the context of the second account.

In Acts 9:19–28, Paul eats and stays awhile with some disciples at Damascus, immediately preaching in the synagogues. The Jews seek to kill him, and he is let down out of the city in a basket. He goes down to Jerusalem to join with the disciples there. Barnabas brings him to the Apostles, where his deeds are recounted to them. He then travels around Jerusalem with them, preaching. When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he contradicted the author of Acts; in Galatians 1:15–20, he says that after his vision he did not confer with flesh and blood and did not go to Jerusalem until he had first gone to Arabia and back to Damascus. After three years, he went to see Peter and ended up staying with him fifteen days.

So which first vision account of Paul should we believe? Paul's vision doesn't fare well under Mr. McKeever's standard, does it? If Paul's memory failed him on exact details from time to time, we should not condemn Joseph Smith for a similar failure, unless of course we wish to adopt a double standard.
What I found even more disappointing about this chapter was its lack of coherence with the chapter title. From pages 27–30 the subject jumps to Moroni, proceeds to speak of the weight of the plates and their composition, and then changes once more on pages 30–31 to Joseph Smith’s 1826 trial. This disorder is characteristic of much of the book.

The third chapter concerns itself with justifying the book’s multitude of quotations from “obscure” reference materials (obscure because not everyone has access to them and many do not have the funds to purchase these sometimes hard-to-obtain sources). McKeever and Johnson try to make the Journal of Discourses appear like a scriptural standard work by displaying, on their page 40, the preface to volume eight, which informs us, “The Journal of Discourses deservedly ranks as one of the standard works of the Church.”

What did the author of the preface actually mean by this statement? The term *standard work* has several meanings. One of the meanings is “a work of recognized excellence.” Another is “a work that serves as a basis of weight, measure, value, comparison, or judgment.” A third meaning, closely related to the second, is “a work that is officially approved.” The Journal of Discourses was considered a standard work by some in the sense that it was of recognized excellence—it contained the words of God to mankind and to his servants, as well as commentary on the meaning of the scriptures. At no time, however, was the series considered the same as the official standard works, nor was it ever presented to the general Church body for its acceptance as Church doctrine. Joseph Smith even said, “the hymn book, as a new edition, containing a greater variety of hymns, will be shortly published or printed in this place, which I think will be a standard work.” Yet at no time did he ever regard the hymn book as a fundamental source of truth nor as having equal value to the scriptures.

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3  *JD* 8:preface.
5  *TPJS*, 164.
Brigham Young’s statement in the Journal of Discourses on how doctrinal truth is determined in the Church is virtually always ignored:

In trying all matters of doctrine, to make a decision valid, it is necessary to obtain a unanimous voice, faith, and decision. In the capacity of a Quorum, the three First Presidents must be one in their voice—the Twelve Apostles must be unanimous in their voice, to obtain a righteous decision upon any matter that may come before them, as you may read in the Doctrine and Covenants. . . . Whenever you see these Quorums unanimous in their declaration, you may set it down as true.6

It is a fact that General Authorities have disagreed on a number of issues. Some of these issues were mentioned in the Journal of Discourses but have never become official doctrine. Consider also these quotations from Brigham Young:

It is your privilege and duty to live so that you know when the word of the Lord is spoken to you and when the mind of the Lord is revealed to you. . . . Suppose I were to teach you a false doctrine, how are you to know it if you do not possess the Spirit of God?7

“Live so that you will know whether I teach you truth or not.” Suppose you are careless and unconcerned, and give way to the spirit of the world, and I am led, likewise, to preach the things of this world and to accept things that are not of God, how easy it would be for me to lead you astray! But I say to you, live so that you will know for yourselves whether I tell the truth or not. That is the way we want all Saints to live. Will you do it? Yes, I hope you will, every one of you.8

The First Presidency have of right a great influence over this people; and if we should get out of the way and lead this people to destruction, what a pity it would

6 JD 9:91–92.
7 JD 18:72.
8 JD 18:248.
be! How can you know whether we lead you correctly or not? Can you know by any other power than that of the Holy Ghost? I have uniformly exhorted the people to obtain this living witness each for themselves; then no man on earth can lead them astray.⁹

How do you know but I am teaching false doctrine? How do you know that I am not counseling you wrong? How do you know but I will lead you to destruction? And this is what I wish to urge upon you—live so that you can discern between the truth and error, between light and darkness, between the things of God and those not of God, for by the revelations of the Lord, and these alone, can you and I understand the things of God. . . .

But to return to my question to the Saints, “How are you going to know about the will and commands of heaven?” By the Spirit of revelation; that is the only way you can know. How do I know but what I am doing wrong? How do I know but what we will take a course for our utter ruin? I sometimes say to my brethren, “I have been your dictator for twenty-seven years”—over a quarter of a century I have dictated this people; that ought to be some evidence that my course is onward and upward. But how do you know that I may not yet do wrong? How do you know but I will bring in false doctrine and teach the people lies that they may be damned?¹⁰

Brigham Young made many such statements, but this should suffice. He was keenly aware of the possibility that he might make a mistake and wanted the Saints to understand that they should not have blind faith in their leaders. He was also disgusted with the idea that men would depend “upon another of their poor, weak, fellow mortals” or “[pin] their faith upon another’s sleeve” for salvation.¹¹

⁹ JD 6:100.
¹⁰ JD 14:204–5.
¹¹ JD 1:312.
In fact, contrary to the critics' claims, Brigham Young did not claim infallibility in all things. He once said that "it is not the place for any person to correct any person who is superior to them, but ask the Father in the name of Jesus to bind him up from speaking false principles. I have known many times I have preached wrong."  

In the fourth chapter the authors quote from various books on the textual transmission of the Old and New Testaments and from Josh McDowell’s *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. The claim that the authors advance thereby is that the Bible does not contradict itself or have any major textual problems. Anyone, however, who has studied the Septuagint or the Dead Sea Scrolls or has read the Bible carefully knows that from time to time discrepancies occur. Many of these can be reconciled after a bout with the original languages, but that usually only serves to prove that the Saints were correct in their view after all. Other discrepancies are not so easy to reconcile.

For example, the evidence of the Septuagint, or Greek Old Testament, taken with the Dead Sea Scrolls, reveals at least two different recensions of the text of Jeremiah, one of which is about 12.5% shorter. The authors never tell the reader that.  

McKeever and Johnson also want the reader to believe that the talmudic standard of absolute rectitude required in copying biblical manuscripts played a part in the preservation of the text, and that because of it later manuscripts can be regarded as just as authoritative as the originals. The reality is that this standard came into use after the rabbis determined a standardized form of the Hebrew text. The Dead Sea Scrolls more than refute the supposition that the standard of the rabbis was practiced any earlier than the Common Era. At any rate, even if we were to trace the manuscript history to original texts, we still would have only the abridgments of the composite texts of the ancient prophets. And for the New Testament we have no ancient manuscripts that date before A.D. 200 that can be used to determine the original text of the New Testament.

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12 Thomas Bullock minutes, 8 May 1854, Church Historical Department.
The authors proceed to give their reasons why the priesthood in the Latter-day Saint Church is not ancient (pp. 83–91). Briefly, the authors try to make a case that the Aaronic Priesthood was done away in Christ; hence there would no longer be a need for it. Because of this “fact,” the Latter-day Saint Church cannot claim it. The authors then assert that Jesus is the only high priest after the order of Melchizedek (p. 91) and that “Since the Book of Mormon also fails to mention the Melchizedek Priesthood, it appears that the Nephites were also acting without proper authority and did not represent ‘the true church’” (p. 84). While it is true that the Book of Mormon does not mention the priesthood of Melchizedek per se, the Book of Mormon does make clear that this is the priesthood referred to. For example, Alma speaks of many priests who were ordained after the order of the Son of God (Alma 13:1–2, 6–11). He then refers to “Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order” (Alma 13:14). If this is not a clear reference to the Melchizedek Priesthood being held by the Nephites, I don’t know what is.

Because the Melchizedek Priesthood was in full operation among the Nephite people, very likely with no Levites of the line of Aaron among them, there should be no mention of the Aaronic Priesthood in the Book of Mormon. Obviously the authors do not understand that not all aspects of current Latter-day Saint practice are found among ancient peoples. And why wouldn’t we expect that? We are in what is known as the dispensation of the fulness of times, in which all the keys of the priesthood in every past dispensation are to be united as one. In other words, just because an ancient people did not possess the Aaronic Priesthood does not mean that they were not of the true church. Paul taught “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Ephesians 1:10). Joseph Smith further explained in the Doctrine and Covenants:

It is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time.
And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. (D&C 128:18)

Several questions arise when the evangelical position is examined. First of all, how does one interpret the scriptures as teaching that the Aaronic Priesthood is fulfilled (or completely abolished, as most evangelicals understand it) when there is no explicit verse of scripture that supports this view? How does one interpret passages like Exodus 40:15 and Numbers 25:13, which declare quite clearly that the Aaronic Priesthood was to be an everlasting priesthood to be passed down from generation to generation? How does one deal with Isaiah 66:18–22, which prophesies that in the end time there would again be priests and Levites or, as others translate it, levitical priests? Knowledgeable Latter-day Saints are perfectly at home with these ideas. The question is, where will these levitical priests get their authority? “No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:4). Aaron was called of God by a prophet. Therefore the keys of the levitical priesthood would of necessity be upon the earth when the time came for the complete fulfillment of these prophecies, as well as a prophet to call the levitical priests to service. If these prophecies are not to be fulfilled, then Isaiah, Malachi, and Ezekiel are false prophets. Imagine the mental havoc this could cause. One might even call into question the status of Christ as Son of God because he quoted Isaiah often. If Isaiah was a false prophet, should not Jesus have recognized that fact?

The other possibility is that someone later tampered with the biblical texts just mentioned. However, this creates a major dilemma for evangelicals. If these texts were interpolated, then that would mean that passages with heavy doctrinal impact were changed. Either way you look at it, the Latter-day Saints are right. Either one must accept the view that the Bible has been altered in a major way or one must accept the Latter-day Saint teaching that

14 See also Malachi 3:3–4 and Ezekiel 40–47.
15 See, for example, TPJS, 171–72.
the Aaronic Priesthood will play a major part in the events of the latter days. Under these conditions it is perfectly logical for Mormons to believe as they do.

After citing Alma 13:10, the authors quote from a Doctrine and Covenants student manual and then say that the references are “a clear contradiction of the biblical pattern” (p. 90). The authors here compare apples with oranges and expect the reader to agree with them. Their comparison of statements from Church publications with history is not accurate, since the high priests mentioned in the Church publications are after the order of Melchizedek, while the high priests mentioned in Luke 3:2 and throughout most of the Old Testament are of the order of Aaron. The two offices are completely different in their function and authority, as anyone with an understanding of Latter-day Saint doctrine would know.

I will explore one final question on this issue before continuing. The authors earlier stated that there was only one high priest after the order of Melchizedek—Jesus Christ. They completely sidestep the fact that Melchizedek himself was a priest of that manner, making at least two. How many priesthoods are there? All will agree that the Bible mentions only two priesthood orders, the Aaronic and Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11). Another question must now be asked. Before the Aaronic Priesthood was instituted, an indeterminate number of priests who “come near to the Lord” were mentioned (Exodus 19:22, 24). If the Bible lists only two priesthoods and the Aaronic Priesthood did not yet exist, to which order of priesthood did these priests belong? Logic dictates that these individuals held the Melchizedek Priesthood. These anti-Mormon authors might counter this statement by asking, “If the Melchizedek Priesthood was among the people at this time, what need was there for the Lord to give the Aaronic Priesthood?” Of course, if they read their Bibles more carefully, they might know that the law of Moses (and its accompanying lineal priesthood) was revealed because of the transgressions of the children of Israel (Galatians 3:19).

The authors dedicate some pages to the concepts of the temple and temple worthiness (pp. 94–96). In this chapter, the authors again compare apples with oranges. They contrast the differences between practices in the Jerusalem temple and modern Latter-day
Saint temples. In addition to belaboring the obvious, the authors make serious mistakes. The reason for the differences should be apparent, since the authors have been tirelessly claiming throughout the book that sacrifices of animals under the law of Moses have been done away with because of the sacrifice of the Savior. Could this be why there is such a difference between the two types of temples?

The authors speak of temple recommends and then quote the story found in Luke 18:11–14 of the Pharisee and the publican who went to pray in the temple (pp. 94–95). The authors then ask, “Certainly, if temple ‘recommends’ were required in biblical times, this publican would not have qualified under today’s Mormon guidelines. If worthiness has always been a requirement to enter a temple, how did the publican of Luke 18 get in?” (p. 95). Had the authors only turned to the Greek text, they would not have made the errors that they did. The Greek text says that the two individuals went up to the ἱερόν or hieron. This is different from the ναός or naos. Although the two words are both translated temple in our Bibles, they actually have distinct meanings. The hieron is the general word that means sanctuary or temple and includes the temple precinct with its buildings, courts, and walls. The naos was the temple proper, or divine habitation.

Richard C. Trench, in distinguishing these two terms, wrote:

The distinction between hieron and naos helps us better understand several New Testament passages. When Zacharias entered into “the temple of the Lord” to burn incense, the people who awaited his return and who stood “outside” (Luke 1:10) also were in the temple—the hieron—though Zacharias alone entered the naos, the “temple” in its narrower sense. We often read of Christ teaching “in the temple” (Matt. 26:55; Luke 21:37; John 8:20), and we might wonder how long conversations could have been maintained there without interrupting the service of God. But this “temple” is always the hieron, the porches and porticoes of the temple that were intended for such purposes. Christ never entered the naos during his earthly ministry, since that right was reserved for the priests. Jesus drove the money-changers and the buyers and
sellers with their sheep and oxen from the hieron, not from the naos. Even those profane men had not dared to establish themselves in the temple in its strictest sense (Matt. 21:12; John 2:14).

Keeping in mind the distinction between hieron and naos helps us understand how the prophet Zacharias could be slain "between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35). Here the word translated "temple" is naos, which helps to answer the questions: "Was not the altar in the temple? And if so, how could any locality be described as between the two?" The brazen altar alluded to in Matthew 23:35 was located in the hieron, not in the naos. It was situated "in the court of the house of the Lord," where the sacred historian (2 Chron. 24:21) lays the scene of this murder, not in the naos.16

Admittedly, the two words seem to be used synonymously in a very few instances. However, when one understands the cultural background of the situation that Jesus describes in Luke 18, it becomes clear that it occurred in one of the outer courts, not in the temple proper. The statement "standing afar off" (Luke 18:13) in the passage makes clear that the Pharisee and the publican were not close together. To think that the Pharisee, who thought himself superior to the publican, would have allowed an unclean person to stand in the sacred precincts without an uproar is asking too much. If Latter-day Saint standards were in effect during biblical times, the publican would certainly not need a temple recommend to pray on the temple grounds, so the authors' point is simply moot, as is their comparison of the purposes for the temple. Since the final sacrifice of Christ, the temple is no longer a place to purge away sins—the atonement takes care of that. Today the temple is a sacred place in which to grow closer to our Heavenly Father, while we do work for those who cannot do it for themselves and while we learn more of the ways of the Lord.

The authors also debunk the Latter-day Saint practice of baptism for the dead (p. 97–105). They allege a lack of historical support for the doctrine, while quoting from Milton R. Hunter:

With so much expense incurred and effort given to baptism for the dead by the LDS Church, it seems peculiar that there is a major lack of biblical backing to support this keystone Mormon doctrine. Milton R. Hunter, a former member of the First Council of the Seventy, explained one possible reason when he said:

This doctrine was so well known by Jesus’ apostles and the members of the Christian Church during the Apostolic Age that Paul need not explain the doctrine in detail when he wrote to the Saints.

Again the Mormon scholar must turn to the argument of silence. If Paul did not need to explain “well known” doctrines in detail, it is a wonder such important doctrines as faith, grace, and the atonement of Christ were ever mentioned at all. To the contrary, if baptism for the dead is such a vital doctrine as the Latter-day Saint Church would have its members believe, then one would expect to find many additional biblical references to support it. (p. 104)\textsuperscript{17}

First of all, why couldn’t Elder Hunter have been right in this instance? There does not necessarily need to be a great number of biblical references to baptism for the dead, as the authors wish us to believe. The authors are also drawing a conclusion based upon an argument from silence. However, when one understands the circumstances that resulted in the writing of much of the New Testament, the explanation that Elder Hunter gives is quite plausible. Most of the New Testament (indeed, all but one of the letters of Paul) was written to combat false ideologies that kept emerging among the Saints. In each case doctrinal issues involving grace,

faith, the relevance of the law to Christians, and the atonement of Christ were hotbeds of theological debate and misunderstanding. It is no wonder that these subjects were mentioned so many times. Contrast this with the lone mention of baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29. The only reason this was even mentioned at all was to demonstrate the inconsistency between the beliefs and practices of some of the Corinthian Saints. The fact is that in many instances Paul did not go into great detail in discussing the doctrines of God. Why not? Because the Saints already knew and understood these matters. One other fact should be pointed out here. We do not have all the writings of Paul. In 1 Corinthians 5:9, he made mention of a letter he had previously written to the Corinthian Saints. This now-missing letter was important enough to Paul to have the Corinthians refer back to it. It was Paul’s habit to refer to more than one subject in his letters. What else was written in the letter that is now lost to us—the real 1 Corinthians? Could it have had more references to the practice of baptism for the dead? Until that letter is found, it will never be proved that Paul did not teach more on that subject, just as it will never be proved that he did. Interestingly, though, a number of non-Latter-day Saint writers do not have as dim a view of the practice as the authors of Questions. One of them said this:

In his first epistle to the Corinthians Paul wrote: “Otherwise, what shall they do who are being baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are they being baptized for them” (Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians 15:29). . . .

Once the theological pressures from later possible developments of practice and doctrine are felt less constraining, the text seems to speak plainly enough about a practice within the Church of vicarious baptism for the dead. This is the view of most contemporary critical exegetes.18

Several factors demand due consideration to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation of this much debated passage.

1. οἱ βαπτίζομενοι is a present passive participle. It can only refer to Christian baptism, unless otherwise defined (which it is not). These two facts taken together indicate that the action occurs regularly and is known to every Corinthian saint.

2. τῶν νεκρῶν points to a specific class of the dead, and the words are in the genitive plural, demonstrating that ύπερ is genitive and not accusative as the critics want so desperately to believe. This is significant because some of the critics know that ύπερ in the accusative case means "over" and try to link the practice with pagan and heretic groups that had rites in which adherents were washed over the graves of the dead. Here, the genitive case of the words more than refutes this view and strengthens the Latter-day Saint argument that the action of baptizing takes place in behalf of the dead.

3. According to the Expositor's Greek Testament:

In following up ver. 29 with the words of ver. 30 (τί καὶ ἑκεῖνες κυνδυνεδομένει) Paul associates himself with the action of "those baptised for the dead," indicating that they and he are engaged on the same behalf.19

4. According to the New International Commentary on the New Testament:

The objection that the apostle could not have meant anything like a baptism for the benefit of others is exegetically out of place. . . . If Paul had disapproved of it he probably would have written more about it than what this one reference contains. In any case the apostle could hardly derive an argument for the resurrection of the body from a practice of which he did not approve.20

5. The Interpreter's Bible has this to offer:


Paul turns to an interesting item of Church practice in Corinth and probably elsewhere too. . . . At its best, the vicarious ceremony was a tribute to the spirit of fellowship, of unity, and of solidarity in the community, and as such it would be sure to commend itself to Paul. There are still some survivals of this ancient Christian practice. . . . In a sense, it might be compared with prayers offered for the dead. . . . Perhaps it is as well to leave the matter there. Paul is content to do so, merely pointing to this ancient rite, and incidentally giving us another glimpse into the customary procedures of the early Christian fellowship as they illustrated the truth of the Resurrection.21

The late K. S. Wuest, teacher emeritus of New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, keeping all of this in mind, translated the passage: “Otherwise, what shall those do who are being baptized for the sake of those who are dead. Assuming that the dead are not actually raised up, why then are we being baptized for their sake?”22

Other (non-Mormon) biblical scholars agree. “It seems that in Corinth,” they write, “some Christians would undergo baptism in the name of their deceased non-Christian relatives and friends, hoping that this vicarious baptism might assure them a share in the redemption of Christ.”23 What further need have we to debate this point?

On pages 113–24, the authors attack the Latter-day Saint doctrine that eternal life, in its fullest sense, is synonymous with becoming a god, and they try to show that the idea is impossible. The authors err greatly when they write, “Christianity has never defined eternal life as godhood” (p. 122). A fair assessment of what the Fathers meant when they spoke of one God and when they spoke of the meaning of eternal life can only be gained from

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21 Interpreter’s Bible, 1 Corinthians (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951–57), 240.
a personal examination of the texts. Following is a cursory synopsis of what was believed about eternal life by the Fathers of the early Christian church (emphasis added):

1. "We have learned that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue." 24

2. "The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself." 25

3. "Then having become pure in heart, and near to the Lord, there awaits them restoration to everlasting contemplation; and they are called by the title of gods, being destined to sit on thrones with the other gods that have been first put in their places by the Savior." 26

4. "For we shall be even gods, if we shall deserve to be among those of whom He declared, 'I have said, Ye are gods,' and, 'God standeth in the congregation of the gods.' But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us, because it is He alone who can make gods." 27

5. "The first-born of all creation, who is the first to be with God ... is a being of more exalted rank than the other gods beside Him, of whom God is the God, as it is written, 'The God of gods, the Lord, hath spoken and called the earth.' It was by the offices of the first-born that they became gods, for He drew in generous measure that they should be made gods, and He communicated it to them according to His own bounty. ... Now it is possible that some may dislike what we have said representing the Father as the One true God, but admitting other beings besides the true God, who have become gods by having a share of God. They may fear that the glory of Him who surpasses all creation may be lowered." 28

6. "The Deity (by condescension) does not diminish anything of the dignity of His divine perfection having made you even God unto his glory." 29

24 Justin the Martyr, First Apology 21.
25 Irenaeus, Against Heresies V, preface.
26 Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis VII, 10.
27 Tertullian, Against Hermogenes 5.
28 Origen, Commentary on the Gospel of John II, 2–3.
29 Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies X, 30.
Of further embarrassment to the authors is their philosophical jangling about the nature of God (pp. 120–21). They try to explain that it is impossible for a finite being to become infinite. Of course, they seem to forget that “with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27). It appears that God as he is known to Mormons is much more powerful than God as he is known to evangelicals because Mormons believe he is able to change our finite nature to an infinite one, while that task is obviously impossible for the God of the evangelicals to accomplish. Scientists say that the bumblebee is aerodynamically incapable of flight. Yet it flies. Just because all the facts are not in does not necessarily mean that a principle is not true.

What is interesting is that the authors place a great deal of emphasis on the present-day meaning of the word infinite. In ancient times the Latin word *infinitum*, the source for the English *infinite*, did not mean what the critics infer. The word simply indicated what is beyond counting. A cursory examination of the Latin Bible text shows that the word is often used to indicate the number of men in a large army. Does that mean that it is truly an infinite number? God is said to have an *infinite* knowledge. He is also said to know *all* things. The phrase *all things* necessarily places a limit upon what can be known. If God knows *all* things he cannot, therefore, have an *infinite* knowledge, for if God knows *all* things there is no more that can be known; hence that knowledge can never be truly *infinite*, in the loose, present-day sense of the word.

The remaining pages are spent attacking the view that works are important in obtaining what the Lord has promised to us and affirming the supposed impossibility of our someday becoming perfect (pp. 125–41). The authors, in essence, say, “Why even bother trying?” They say that Matthew 5:48 cannot be used as a proof-text to show that it is possible for mankind to be perfect because it is in the present tense (p. 138). The basic problem occurs again with the translation of the text. The Greek word in the text of Matthew 5:48, *(esēs the)*, is translated erroneously as *Be perfect*. It is the second person, plural, indicative, future, middle deponent form of the verb *(eimi)*. In other words, it means something we must do ourselves—it will not be done for us. We must be actively engaged in the action, but we are not expected to be at that place now. We must press on from this point
forward, expecting the action’s culmination at a future time. In short we must gradually but consistently become perfect, or fully developed, like our Father in Heaven. Only through the ordinances, as administered through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and by the grace of our almighty God can this be accomplished, to the chagrin of our detractors.

I must be honest and say that there are a few positive aspects within *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend*. Church doctrine is often misunderstood by Church members, and this book does point out some of these misunderstandings. It also highlights the hubris of assuming superiority based on holding a current temple recommend. It helps us realize that we all could study our scriptures better than we do and, last, but by no means least, it provides a wonderful missionary opportunity. In all seriousness, I personally know of several baptisms that have recently occurred after individuals studied and questioned this book and other writings from the Mormonism Research Ministry. I believe that far more will join the Church when they see the errors of this book; they will know that the anti-Mormon movement cannot be taken seriously, just as this book cannot be taken seriously as a tool to help Latter-day Saints more closely examine their faith, much less abandon it.

Matthew Roper has made an interesting observation, one from which anti-Mormons would do well to learn:

Since 1830, over 2000 anti-Mormon works . . . have been published. Over half of those have been published since 1960 and a third since 1970 alone. It is perhaps significant that during those last thirty years The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has grown faster than at any other time in its history, fulfilling in certain measure the prediction of Brigham Young: "Every time you kick Mormonism you kick it upstairs; You never kick it downstairs. The Lord Almighty so orders it."³⁰

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