

# The Eternal State of Mankind

by Marvin Cowan

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*The sermon explores the LDS doctrine of eternal progression and contrasts it with biblical teachings on salvation and the eternal state of mankind.*

**Topics:** "Mormon Theology", "Christian Salvation"

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## Description

Marvin Cowan preaches about the Mormon concept of eternal progression, emphasizing the belief in multiple stages of life to achieve perfection and godhood, including the pre-mortal spirit world and mortal probation. He discusses the LDS teaching of three heavens or degrees of glory, reserved for Mormons alone, contrasting it with biblical teachings on salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The sermon also delves into Mormon beliefs on immortality, eternal life, and the absence of hell, highlighting the differences between LDS doctrine and traditional Christian views on salvation and punishment.

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## Transcript

"We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

9th Article of Faith by Joseph Smith

### ETERNAL PROGRESSION

In order to understand the Mormon concept of salvation, one must know something of the LDS doctrine of eternal progression. Milton R. Hunter summarized this doctrine in G.T.A., pp. 126-129. He stated that we are as eternal as God Himself. But to achieve perfection and godhood, we must go through at least four stages of life:

1. In the first stage each of us were conscious eternally existing beings called "intelligences." In that realm, we experienced good and evil, love and hate, free agency and so on until we had completed our work there.
2. LDS do not explain how we progressed from "intelligences" to the pre-mortal spirit world where we were born as baby spirits to God and one of His wives by procreation. They just state that this is what happened. Nor do they explain how God, with a "body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (D. & C. 130:22), begets spirits instead of tangible bodies like he has!

LDS teach that in the pre-mortal spirit life Jesus, Lucifer, and all of us were the spirit children of God and His wives (G.T.A., pp. 15, 93-99; J. of D., Vol. XI, p. 122). Both Jesus and his brother, Lucifer, suggested plans of salvation to God the Father for this world we now inhabit. When Lucifer's plan was rejected, he rebelled and tried to usurp God's throne, but he was defeated by Jesus and those who followed Him. Lucifer and one third of the spirits in heaven who supported him were cast out of heaven to earth where they still tempt mortals to rebel against God.

Although LDS teach that we are all children of God, the Bible declares that we must become "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (John 1:12, Gal. 3:26). That is why Jesus said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). The Bible teaches that those not born again are children of the devil (John 8:44, I John 3:10).

3. The third stage of Eternal Progression is our present mortal probation. None of the wicked pre-mortal spirits who followed Lucifer were privileged to get mortal bodies like we have. But, those "valiant" spirits who fought against Lucifer with Jesus Christ in heaven were given the best bodies of all - with white skins! However, some spirits did not fight valiantly against Lucifer. Those spirits were permitted to have bodies, but they were marked with black skins! They are born into this world in the Negroid race as the sons of Cain and Ham. Because they were not valiant in pre-existence, they were cursed so that they could not hold the LDS "priesthood." Then on June 9, 1978, President Spencer W. Kimball announced that God had revealed to him that all worthy male members of all races could now hold the priesthood. President Kimball's "revelation" ended the curse of not having the priesthood, but it did not change the LDS doctrine of pre-existence nor remove the mark of the curse which Brigham Young said was "the flat nose and the black skin" (J. of D., Vol. VII, p. 290). Brigham went on to say, "That curse will remain upon them and they can never hold the priesthood or share in it until all the other descendants of Adam have received the promises and enjoyed the blessings of the Priesthood and the keys thereof" (Ibid., pp. 290-291). Since all of the other sons of Adam have not received the "blessings" of the LDS priesthood, either Brigham Young was a false prophet, or LDS President Kimball's "revelation" was not from God!

4. Mormonism teaches that when mortals die, their spirits go to a spirit prison which has two compartments. Good LDS people go to "paradise" (M.D. pp. 554-555). All others go to the other area which is often called "spirit prison" (M.D. pp. 754-755). Good LDS missionary spirits come from paradise to the spirit prison to preach the true LDS gospel. Most of the imprisoned spirits will accept the LDS message, but their personal salvation is not completed until proxy baptism, marriage and so on are done for them in an LDS temple on earth. Finally, after the millennium and final judgement, they will go to the degree of glory or heaven they have earned through obedience to the law (A. of F. pp. 147-148).

### Three Heavens or Degrees of Glory

The LDS concept of three heavens, or degrees of glory, comes from D. & C. 76. The first heaven is the "telestial glory," where unbelievers and the worst kind of people go after the final judgment. The second heaven is the "terrestrial glory," where good, religious people who are not Mormons go after judgment. But, the third heaven is the "celestial glory," and is reserved for Mormons alone.

LDS claim that I Cor. 15:40-41 teaches three degrees of glory or three heavens. However, the context in I Cor. 15:35-54 is not about heavens, but about the difference between our earthly mortal body and our new immortal body given us at the resurrection. Celestial and terrestrial bodies are mentioned in v. 40, but any dictionary will show that celestial means "heavenly" and terrestrial means "earthly." The word "telestial" is not found in I Cor. 15 because it was a concept of Joseph Smith's and can only be found in Mormon

teachings. The glory of the sun, moon, and stars in v. 41 is used by LDS to support their concept of three heavens, but the context refers to "bodies," not heavens! If this verse is about different "heavens," then there must be innumerable "glories" or heavens, for it goes on to say that "one star differeth from another star in glory." Furthermore, many stars are actually bigger and brighter than our sun, so if the LDS analogy is followed, the telestial heaven (represented by stars) could be better than the celestial glory (represented by the sun)! In verse 39, Paul mentions four kinds of flesh. Does this verse teach that there are four heavens? That reasoning is just as valid as what the LDS do with verses 40-41.

LDS also use II Cor. 12:2 where Paul mentioned "the third heaven." Anyone familiar with Hebrew thought (and Paul was a Hebrew) knows that they believed in the same three heavens as Christians do today. The first heaven was the atmospheric heaven of clouds, birds, planes, and so on. Second was the heaven of stars and planets. And the third heaven was where God dwelt! Paul said in II Cor. 12:2 that a man was caught up to the third heaven where God is, and v. 4 calls that place "paradise." The Bible nowhere teaches that there are three heavens where people live eternally.

### Immortality and Eternal Life

Because of Mormonism's concept of three heavens, they must also re-define eternal life. W. Cleon Skousen says, "Immortality means to live forever but... acquiring eternal life means to return to the presence of God in the celestial kingdom. And those who are particularly faithful receive 'eternal lives.' This means to become exalted just as our Heavenly Father is... then shall they be gods" (The First 2,000 Years by Cleon Skousen, p. 69).

Apostle Bruce McConkie explains it differently. He says, "Even those in the Celestial Kingdom, however, who do not go on to exaltation, will have immortality only and not eternal life... Salvation in its true and full meaning is synonymous with exaltation or eternal life and consists in gaining an inheritance in the highest of the three heavens within the Celestial Kingdom... This full salvation is obtained in and through the continuation of the family unit in eternity and those who obtain it are gods" (M.D., p. 670). Latter-day apostles, prophets and scripture certainly have not helped the LDS to clarify their doctrines! The B. of M., which is the "Fulness of the gospel" (D. & C. 20:9), does not even mention the three degrees of glory, heavens or kingdoms!

Generally, LDS believe all will have immortality or resurrection, but only LDS can have eternal life and enter the Celestial Kingdom (G.T.A., p. 166). The very best Mormons will gain "eternal lives" or inherit the highest possible position in that celestial kingdom.

LDS believe that there are three degrees or levels within the Celestial Kingdom. While LDS "baptism is the gate to the Celestial Kingdom, Celestial Marriage is the gate to an exaltation in the highest heaven within the Celestial World" (M.D. p. 118).

Mormon scripture says polygamy is one of the requirements for "eternal lives" and godhood (D. & C. 132:1-24). Brigham Young also said, "Now if any of you will deny the plurality of wives, and continue to do so, I promise that you will be damned (J. of D., Vol. III, p. 266). He also said, "The only men who become Gods, even the sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy" (J. of D. Vol. XI, p. 269). But, few Mormons are polygamists due to the federal law against it and the Woodruff Manifesto! All of the other LDS laws and ordinances have to be kept, or they still cannot achieve the celestial kingdom or godhood, according to Mormon authorities. But the Bible as well as the B. of M. clearly teaches that there are only two places to spend eternity - Heaven or Hell.

## No Hell

Even though many do not believe in hell, the Bible speaks of "hell fire" (Matt. 5:22); 18:9), and of everlasting fire (Matt. 18:8 25:41), and everlasting punishment (Matt 25:46). Jesus warned in Matt. 10:28, "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Rom. 5:9 says believers in Christ are "saved from (God's) wrath through Him (Christ). Thus, for those who believe the Bible, there is a very real hell from which to be saved.

LDS Apostle John Widtsoe declared, "In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there is no hell. All will find a measure of salvation" (E. & R., p. 216). Yet, the B. of M. says, "The devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell and behold others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell" (II Nephi 28:21-22). Thus, the B. of M. explains where Mormonism got its doctrine of no hell!

The B. of M. also says, "If ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked" (Alma 34:35).

What good is "baptism for the dead" for such people? James Talmage said, "Upon all who reject the word of God in this life will fall the penalties provided; but after the debt has been paid the prison doors shall be opened, and the spirits once confined in suffering, then chastened and clean shall come forth to partake of the glory provided for in their class" (A. of F., p. 148). Can the "final state of the wicked" really be a temporary prison?

The B. of M. says there is "a punishment which also was as eternal as the life of the soul" and "the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul" (Alma 42:16). And Mosiah 2:38-41 speaks of "never ending torment" and "never ending happiness." That agrees with the Bible, but not with Mormonism! For example, Talmage said:

True eternal punishment has been decreed as the lot of the wicked; but the meaning of this expression has been given by the Lord Himself; eternal punishment is God's punishment; endless punishment is God's punishment, for 'Endless' and 'Eternal' are among His names and the words are descriptive of His attributes. No soul shall be kept in prison or continued in torment beyond the time requisite to work the needed reformation and vindicate justice for which ends alone punishment is imposed (A. of F., pp. 146-147).

Elder John Morgan also said, "Eternal punishment is God's punishment: everlasting punishment is God's punishment; or in other words it is the name of the punishment God inflicts, He being eternal in his nature. Whosoever, therefore receives God's punishment, receives eternal punishment whether it is endured one hour, one day, one week, one year, or an age" (The Plan of Salvation, p. 30).

Even though LDS sometimes speak about hell or eternal punishment, they usually mean a temporary prison. In Mormonism, "eternal" punishment eventually ends, but "eternal" life is unending! Is that consistent?

Mormons also speak of those who are "damned," but they do not mean "condemned" to unending punishment. For example, D. & C. 132:4 declares, "if ye abide not that covenant [of polygamy] then are ye damned." This means that a person's eternal progression is stopped before he achieves Godhood, like a

river is "dammed" up to stop the flow of water. Stephen L. Richards said, "Condemnation or 'damning' is but a retardation in progress" (About Mormonism, p. 12). Thus, LDS do not fear hell. Women have even less reason to fear hell, since Brigham Young said, "I doubt whether it can be found from the revelations that are given and the facts as they exist, that there is a female in all the regions of hell" (J. of D., Vol. VIII, p. 222).

### The Unpardonable Sins

Although most Mormons fear no hell, they believe a few "sons of perdition" will suffer eternally without hope of even going to the telestial glory. These are "apostates" who have denied the truth of Mormonism (D. & C. 76:31-49; 84:40-41, and A. of F. pp. 409-410). D. & C. 76:36-38 says that they are the only ones on whom the second death has any power, and that they will never be redeemed, but are to spend eternity in the lake of fire and brimstone. Brigham Young said such apostates in this life turn "gray-haired, wrinkled and black just like the Devil" (J. of D., Vol. V, p. 332). Apostle John Widtsoe said Brigham Young also taught, "that the ultimate punishment of the sons of perdition may be that they, having their spiritual bodies disorganized, must start over again, must begin anew the long journey of existence repeating the steps that they took in the eternities before the Great Council was held" (E. & R., p. 214; see J. of D., Vol. VII, p. 57).

Apostasy may sound like the "unpardonable sin," but D. & C. 132:27 calls murder "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall not be forgiven in the world nor out of the world." John D. Lee said that he was "the second one adopted by Brigham Young" (Mormonism Unveiled or The Confessions of John D. Lee, p. 70). Nevertheless, Brigham Young made him the scapegoat for the Mountain Meadow Massacre in which 120 people emigrating to California from Arkansas were killed in cold blood under the leadership of Lee and others. LDS President Joseph Fielding Smith said, "John D. Lee was excommunicated from the church at the injunction from Pres. Young that under no circumstances should he ever be admitted as a member again" (Essentials in Church History, p. 516).

That was 17 years after the massacre. Twenty years after the massacre, Lee was found guilty and executed at the site of massacre. But, Juanita Brooks said that on May 8 and 9, 1961, proxy work for the dead was done in the Salt Lake Temple to reinstate John D. Lee to membership and his former blessings (John D. Lee, p. 376). Why was Brigham Young's injunction disobeyed? Was he not a prophet then? What good would baptism for the dead be to Lee who was guilty of murder - which is an unpardonable sin (D. & C. 42:18, 79)? Adultery committed the second time is also listed as one of the unpardonable sins (D. & C. 42:25-26).

### Blood Atonement

In spite of the LDS scripture teaching that murderers cannot be forgiven either now or in eternity, President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

Joseph Smith taught that there were certain sins so grievous that man may commit, that they will place the transgressors beyond the power of the atonement of Christ. If these offenses are committed, then the blood of Christ will not cleanse them from their sins even though they repent. Therefore, their only hope is to have their own blood shed to atone as far as possible, in their behalf... In pursuance of and in harmony with this scriptural doctrine, which has been the righteous law from the days of Adam to the present time, the founders of Utah incorporated in the laws of the Territory provisions for the capital punishment of those who willfully shed the blood of their fellow men. This law, which is now the law of the state, granted unto

the condemned murderer the privilege of choosing for himself whether he die by hanging, or whether he be shot, and thus have his blood shed in harmony with the law of God; and thus atone, so far as it is in his power to atone, for the death of his victim. Almost without exception the condemned party chooses the latter death (D. of S., Vol. I, p. 135-136).

Utah has always offered criminals condemned to death a choice of two ways to die. Utah history records only six legal executions by hanging. All others who received the death penalty were shot by a firing squad until 1987, when lethal injection replaced hanging as the alternative to being shot

If a murder cannot be forgiven in either this world or that which is to come, how can "blood atonement" offer him "hope?" Why should a murderer, who cannot ever be forgiven, care whether or not he died in harmony with God's law? John D. Lee told how Bishop Klingensmith cut Rasmus Anderson's throat from ear to ear to atone for his sin because he was guilty of adultery (Mormonism Unveiled or The Confessions of John D. Lee, p. 283). For more details on blood atonement, read Brigham Young's message in the J. of D., Vol. IV, pp. 219-220.

Brigham Young said, "There is not a man or woman who violates the covenants made with their God, that will not be required to pay the debt. The blood of Christ will never wipe that out, your own blood must atone for it; and the judgments of the Almighty will come, sooner or later, and every man and woman will have to atone for breaking their covenants" (Deseret News, "Church News," October 19, 1963, and June 15, 1968).

However, I John 1:7 declares, "The blood of Jesus Christ His [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin." Even if we could die a million times, our own blood could not wipe out one sin, because the blood of Christ cleanses all believers from all sin! Rom. 5:9 also says, we are "justified by His blood." The only "blood atonement" that has any cleansing power is the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ! Even the B. of M. says, "O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth and all things; who shall come down among the children of men...And this is the means whereby salvation cometh. And there is none other salvation save this which hath been spoken of; neither are there any conditions whereby man can be saved except the conditions which I have told you" (Mosiah 4:2, 7). If Mosiah's message contained the only means of salvation, LDS "blood atonement," must be wrong! And, remember, the B. of M. contains "the fulness of the gospel" (D. & C. 20:8-9; 27:5).

Peter wrote, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:18-19). Since human blood is corruptible, LDS "blood atonement" cannot save anyone. Rev. 1:5 says, Christ "loved us, and washed [loosed] us from our sins in His own blood." And Rom. 3:25 says, God set forth Christ "to be a propitiation through faith in His blood." In other words, Christ Himself "bore our sins in His own body on the tree (I Peter 2:24) which satisfied God's judgement against sin and thus God is propitious or gracious toward sinners who have "faith in His (Christ's) blood. The reason Jesus is called our Savior (I John 4:14) is because He alone can save! Heb. 7:25 declares, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by Him." The meaning of "uttermost" in the original is that He not only saved completely from all sin, but He also saved eternally because He lives forever (Heb. 7:24-25). That is also why Paul said there is only "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5) Peter also declared, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"

(Acts 4:12).

If you are trusting in your church, your baptism, your own works, or anything else other than Christ for salvation, you are lost because you are trusting in some other "name" or "mediator." If you die in that condition you will never be with the Lord in heaven! The Bible says, "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor 6:2). If you have not put your faith in Christ alone for salvation, now is the time to do it! John wrote, "But as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on His name" (John 1:12).

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