

Each Mormon's religion is unique, an unpredictable mixture of traditional Christian concepts, personal feelings, and private interpretations of what the Mormon church has said. In this paper we cite some reasons for significant variations in what you can hear from Mormons you know, Mormon missionaries, and their church's advertisements and publications.

Not intended as an exposé or to mock, information presented here is to help Christians better understand Mormonism and communicate biblical Christian truth to Mormons.

BACKGROUND

Boys and men with "priesthood authority" are ordained to "preach...minister...and govern" in the Mormon church, contributing to complexities and confusion.

[If so inclined, you can read more about Mormon church "principles," including "priesthood authority," at an official Mormon church web site.*]

- The Mormon church views Christ's true church on earth as an organization, and claims exclusively to be that organization. It alone has all the attributes of the church Christ established: the authorities and powers ("keys," they call them), offices, and practices—not to mention the gospel itself ("restored," they say, because it was lost for 1500 years until it was revealed again by revelation to Joseph Smith in the 1800s).

- The "good news" restored by the Mormon church includes continuation of ancient biblical life: prophets, priests, and patriarchs, for example—just three of many unusual features of the Mormon church. They influence everyday life for Mormons and can confuse many Mormons and the Christians they seek to win over.

- According to the Mormon church, "The priesthood is the power and authority of God. ...[He] shares his priesthood power with worthy male members of the Church." The senior member of the Mormon priesthood is the "prophet, who is President of the Church, [who] serves as the spokesman for God to all members of the Church and all people on the earth."

- Boys and men judged "worthy" may be assigned to the "lesser priesthood," the Aaronic Priesthood, or to the "greater priesthood," the Melchizedek Priesthood—or both. The lesser priesthood has

four "offices": deacon (at least age 12); teacher (age 14); priest (age 16); or bishop, who presides over the Aaronic Priesthood in a local Mormon congregation. Each office "carries duties and responsibilities" such as ushering, teaching other members in their homes, and baptizing.

- The bishop in his lesser, Aaronic Priesthood office is "also ordained a high priest," one of five offices in the greater, Melchizedek Priesthood. (Those offices are: elder, high priest, patriarch, seventy, and Apostle.) Like bishops, patriarchs also hold two priesthood offices—patriarch, of course, and high priest, both in the greater priesthood. —And so on!

HOW THIS INTRODUCES CONFUSION

A sample of Mormon priesthood offices: Prophet, priest, and patriarch. Each (there are others) is a source of serious variations in beliefs among Mormons about the "official" teachings of the Mormon church.

- During the 183 years of the Mormon church, its 16 successive presidents / **prophets** have not always agreed on the church's extra-biblical doctrines. Mormons are told that a prophet's words "become scripture," and that they are to follow the latest "living prophet," not dead ones. (Mormon church publications also "become scripture," and they, too, are filled with inconsistencies.) All 15 Apostles today are considered prophets, seers, and revelators—introducing even more variations in beliefs among Mormon church members.

- Mormon **priests** as young as 16 visit and teach church members in their homes. Thousands will become "elders"—young Mormon missionaries—teaching members and nonmembers alike. They will "testify" and teach convincingly, but not necessarily with accurate or official church doctrine.

- Mormons are told they may receive personal revelation. Priesthood **patriarchs**, who are also high priests, are one channel for delivering "the word of the Lord personally to us." A "patriarchal blessing," a prophetic look at a person's "calling on earth," may foresee details about a happy lifetime in the Mormon church. (Typically, if things don't pan out, the member is at fault, not the patriarch.) It may also discern genealogical information, even to ancient days.

REMINDERS

- Mormons often suggest that their religion is true, and better than other churches because it has a living prophet, and priesthoods named after the Aaron and Melchizedek of the Bible. You do not have to address head-on these ideas and other idiosyncrasies of Mormon church organization.

- Christians can testify that Christ Himself is our High Priest forever. He alone is our Advocate with the Father. He is our Living Prophet. The Bible is the word of God.

- Talk about eternal life, God's gift by grace and faith alone.

*<http://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles?lang=eng>