

Latter-day Saints Are Christians: A Comprehensive Defense

| Introduction

The charge that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are "not real Christians" is one of the most common and emotionally charged accusations in religious discourse. It functions as a rhetorical excommunication — an attempt to place Latter-day Saints outside the boundaries of a faith they claim with their whole hearts. The charge rests on a particular strategy: defining "Christianity" by adherence to post-biblical creeds rather than by devotion to Jesus Christ, and then declaring that anyone who rejects those creeds is outside the fold. This approach would have excluded many of the earliest followers of Jesus, who knew nothing of Nicaea or Chalcedon, and it reflects a fundamental confusion between the historical development of Christian theology and the identity of Christianity itself.

| The Criticism (Steelmanned)

The strongest version of this argument runs as follows: Christianity has been defined for centuries by adherence to the ecumenical creeds — particularly the Nicene Creed (325/381 AD) and the Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD). These creeds established the boundaries of orthodox belief regarding the nature of God (Trinity), the nature of Christ (fully God and fully man in one person), and the means of salvation (grace through faith). Latter-day Saint theology departs from every one of these boundaries: it rejects the Trinity in favor of three separate beings, it adds additional scriptures to the biblical canon, and it teaches a view of salvation that includes works, ordinances, and the potential for human deification. If Christianity is defined by these historic theological commitments, then Latter-day Saint theology is a different religion that uses Christian terminology but fills it with different meaning.

This is a thoughtful argument, and it must be addressed directly.

| Biblical Response

What Makes Someone a Christian? The Biblical Definition

The word "Christian" appears three times in the New Testament:

1. **Acts 11:26** — "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The term was applied to those who followed Christ — His disciples. No creedal test is mentioned.
2. **Acts 26:28** — Agrippa says to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Agrippa understood "Christian" to mean a follower of Christ and His teachings.

3. **1 Peter 4:16** — "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." Being a Christian meant bearing Christ's name and suffering for His sake.

In every instance, "Christian" means a follower of Jesus Christ. There is no reference to a creedal definition, a Trinitarian formula, or a philosophical test. The biblical definition of a Christian is someone who believes in Jesus Christ, follows Him, and bears His name.

Jesus' Own Test for His Followers

Jesus Himself defined what it means to follow Him:

- **John 13:35** — "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." The test is love, not creedal correctness.
- **Matthew 7:21** — "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." The test is obedience to the Father's will.
- **John 14:15** — "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Discipleship is defined by keeping Christ's commandments.
- **Matthew 16:15-17** — When Peter confessed "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said this knowledge came by revelation from the Father. Peter did not confess the Nicene Creed. He confessed the simple, foundational truth that Jesus is the Christ. This is the rock upon which the church is built.
- **John 3:16** — "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The criterion is belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

By every biblical measure, Latter-day Saints are Christians. We believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. We follow His commandments. We bear His name. We love one another. We seek to do the Father's will.

The New Testament Did Not Use Creedal Tests

The apostles did not require converts to affirm a philosophical definition of God's nature. The earliest Christian confession was simple: "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3, Philippians 2:11). Paul wrote: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). This is the apostolic test of Christian faith. Latter-day Saints pass it without reservation.

The detailed theological specifications of the creeds — *homoousios*, two natures in one person, eternal generation — are nowhere in scripture. They are philosophical elaborations developed centuries later. To retroactively impose them as the definition of "Christian" is to change the rules after the game has started.

| Early Christian Evidence

The Creeds Were Contested, Not Universal

The Nicene Creed was not a serene expression of universal Christian belief. It was the product of fierce political and theological conflict.

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) was convened by Emperor Constantine — a political leader, not an apostle — to resolve a dispute between Arius and Alexander of Alexandria. The resulting creed was imposed with imperial authority. Bishops who refused to sign were exiled. Within a decade, the political winds shifted, and Arian and semi-Arian views gained imperial favor. Athanasius, the champion of Nicaea, was exiled five times. The "orthodox" position was in the minority for much of the fourth century.

The Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD) similarly divided Christendom. The Oriental Orthodox churches (Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, Syriac) rejected Chalcedon and remain separate to this day. These are ancient Christian communities with unbroken histories stretching back to the apostolic era. If Chalcedon defines Christianity, then these millions of Christians — with traditions older than most Western denominations — are excluded.

The claim that "the creeds define Christianity" ignores the messy, political, and deeply contested history of their formation.

Early Christians Had Diverse Theologies

Before the creeds standardized doctrine, early Christians held a range of views that would trouble modern creedal gatekeepers:

- **Subordinationism** (the Son is divine but subordinate to the Father) was the majority view in the pre-Nicene period (Justin Martyr, Origen, Tertullian). This is closer to LDS theology than to Nicene orthodoxy.
- **Deification/Theosis** — the belief that humans can become divine — was taught by many early Fathers. Irenaeus wrote: "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" (*Against Heresies*, 5, preface). Athanasius wrote: "He was made man that we might be made God" (*On the Incarnation*, 54.3). Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and others taught forms of theosis. The LDS doctrine of exaltation, far from being an aberration, has deep roots in early Christianity.
- **The Eastern Orthodox Church** to this day affirms theosis as a central doctrine. If this belief disqualifies Latter-day Saints from Christianity, it disqualifies the Orthodox as well.

The Definition of "Christian" Has Been Weaponized Throughout History

- Catholics declared Protestants non-Christian during the Reformation.
- Protestants declared Catholics non-Christian.
- Calvinists declared Arminians heretical.
- Various Protestant denominations have declared each other outside true Christianity.

The pattern is clear: the charge "you're not a real Christian" is a power move, not a theological argument. It is wielded by whoever holds the current majority position to exclude dissenters. It was used against the early Christians by Jews, against Protestants by Catholics, and now against Latter-day Saints by Protestants. The question should not be "do you match our theological specifications?" but "do you follow Jesus Christ?"

| LDS Doctrinal Position

What Latter-day Saints Believe About Jesus Christ

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches:

1. **Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father** (John 3:16, 1 Nephi 11:18-21).
2. **Jesus Christ is the Creator of heaven and earth** (John 1:3, Mosiah 3:8, D&C 76:24).
3. **Jesus Christ is divine** — He is a God, possessing the fulness of the Father's glory and power (Colossians 2:9, 3 Nephi 11:10-11).
4. **Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary**, lived a sinless life, and taught the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 1:18-23, 1 Nephi 11:18-20).
5. **Jesus Christ suffered in Gethsemane and on the cross for the sins of all humanity** (Luke 22:44, Alma 7:11-13, D&C 19:16-19).
6. **Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again on the third day** — His resurrection was literal, physical, and real (Luke 24:36-39, 3 Nephi 11:14-15).
7. **Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation** — "there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent" (Mosiah 3:17; see also 2 Nephi 25:20, Acts 4:12).
8. **Jesus Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead** (Acts 1:11, D&C 29:11).
9. **He is the central figure of our worship, our faith, and our lives.** The very name of the Church bears His name.

To claim that a church which bears Christ's name, worships Him as Savior and Redeemer, teaches that He is the only way of salvation, and centers its entire theology on His Atonement is "not Christian" requires a definition of "Christian" so narrow that it excludes Christ's own apostles, who held none of the Nicene categories.

The Name of the Church

The full name is The Church of **Jesus Christ** of Latter-day Saints. It is not possible to claim that a church named after Jesus Christ is not a Christian church without engaging in a definitional sleight-of-hand.

Key Scriptures

Scripture	Point
Acts 11:26	"Christians" = followers of Christ. No creedal test.
Romans 10:9	Confess Jesus as Lord + believe in His resurrection = saved. LDS affirm both.
1 Cor. 12:3	"No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." LDS confess this.
John 13:35	Disciples known by love — not by creedal precision
Matt. 16:15-17	"Thou art the Christ" — the foundational confession. LDS affirm it.
John 3:16	"Whosoever believeth in him" — the criterion is belief in Christ
Matt. 7:21	Doing the Father's will — the test of discipleship
Acts 4:12	"Neither is there salvation in any other" — LDS affirm Christ is the only way
2 Nephi 25:26	"We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ...that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins"
Mosiah 3:17	"No other name...whereby salvation can come...only in and through the name of Christ"
3 Nephi 27:27	"What manner of men ought ye to be? Even as I am." — Christ as the model

Responses to Common Objections

Objection: "You believe in a different Jesus."

Response: We believe in the Jesus of the New Testament — born of a virgin, worker of miracles, teacher of parables, healer of the sick, who suffered in Gethsemane, died on the cross, rose on the third day, and ascended to heaven. We believe He is the Son of God, the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Judge. The claim that we believe in a "different Jesus" typically reduces to: "your philosophical definition of His relationship to the Father differs from ours." But the Jesus of the Bible is not a philosophical abstraction. He is a person — and we believe in, worship, and follow the same person. The Apostle Paul warned of those who preached "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4) — he was referring to those who denied Christ's divinity or His resurrection, not those who disagreed about fourth-century metaphysics.

Objection: "You have additional scriptures, so you're not biblical Christians."

Response: Having additional scripture does not make one non-Christian any more than having the New Testament makes one non-Jewish. The New Testament was "additional scripture" to the first-century Jewish canon. Early Christians did not stop being followers of God when they accepted new revelation. The Book of Mormon is subtitled "Another Testament of Jesus Christ" — its entire purpose is to testify of Christ. It contains some of the most powerful and explicit testimonies of Jesus Christ in all of religious literature (see 2 Nephi 25:26, Mosiah 3:17, 3 Nephi 11:10-11).

Objection: "You believe humans can become gods — that's not Christian."

Response: The early Church Fathers explicitly taught deification (theosis). Irenaeus: "He became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself." Athanasius: "He was made man that we might be made God." The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches theosis today. This is arguably one of the most ancient Christian doctrines, not a Latter-day Saint invention. The biblical basis includes: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48); "We shall be like him" (1 John 3:2); "Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17); "Ye are gods" (John 10:34, quoting Psalm 82:6); "Partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

Objection: "Christianity is defined by the creeds — you reject them."

Response: Christianity is defined by Christ, not by fourth-century committees. The apostles who walked with Jesus, died for Him, and wrote the New Testament knew nothing of the Nicene or Chalcedonian formulas. If they were Christian without the creeds, then the creeds are not necessary conditions for Christianity. The creeds may represent one tradition's attempt to articulate Christian theology, but they are not the definition of the faith itself.

Objection: "You don't believe in salvation by grace alone."

Response: We believe salvation is entirely dependent on the grace of Jesus Christ. No human effort can earn or merit salvation. 2 Nephi 25:23 is often misquoted — "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do." The phrase "after all we can do" has been clarified by LDS leaders and scholars to mean "in spite of all we can do" or "notwithstanding all we can do" — that is, regardless of our best efforts, grace is what saves. The Book of Mormon is emphatic: "Since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself" (Alma 22:14). "There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Nephi 2:8). Our belief in the

necessity of faith, repentance, baptism, and obedience does not diminish grace — it describes how we access and respond to it, exactly as the New Testament teaches (James 2:17-26, Philippians 2:12, Matthew 7:21).

Objection: "The way you understand God is fundamentally different — separate beings is not the Christian God."

Response: The pre-Nicene Christians understood God the Father and God the Son as distinct in ways much closer to Latter-day Saint theology than to Nicene Trinitarianism (see the Trinity defense document for detailed evidence). If the earliest Christians were Christian with a subordinationist understanding of the Godhead, then a theology of distinct divine beings cannot be disqualifying. The question is whether we worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and His Son Jesus Christ. We do.

| Conclusion

The charge that Latter-day Saints are not Christians is a definitional power play, not a biblical argument. It defines Christianity by post-biblical philosophical formulas rather than by the biblical criteria Jesus Himself established: belief in Him, love for one another, obedience to His commandments, and confession that He is the Christ. By every New Testament measure, Latter-day Saints are Christians.

We bear His name. We worship Him as our Savior and Redeemer. We teach that He is the only way of salvation. We study His words in the Bible and in additional scriptures that testify of Him. We strive to keep His commandments. We take upon ourselves His name in baptism and sacrament. We serve in His name. We look forward to His return.

If that is not Christianity, then the word has lost all meaning.

| Sources and Further Reading

- [FAIR: Are Mormons Christian?](#)
- [Church of Jesus Christ: Are Mormons Christian?](#)
- [Church of Jesus Christ: Christ the Savior](#)
- Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991)
- Robert L. Millet, *A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-day Saints* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005)
- Dallin H. Oaks, "The Only True God and Jesus Christ Whom He Hath Sent", General Conference, October 2007
- Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Only True God and Jesus Christ Whom He Hath Sent", and "Heresy", various addresses
- Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976) — on theosis in Eastern Orthodoxy

| Addresses

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/arguments/Mormons-Are-Not-Real-Christians|Argument: Mormons Are Not Real Christians\]\]](#)

| Related Defenses

- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/trinity-biblical-orthodoxy-full|Trinity Defense \(Full\)\]\]](#)
- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/trinity-biblical-orthodoxy-cheatsheet|Trinity Defense \(Cheat Sheet\)\]\]](#)
- [\[\[_obsidian_research/defense-drafts/mormons-polytheism-full|Polytheism Defense \(Full\)\]\]](#)
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