

Latter-day Saints Worship the Jesus of the New Testament: A Defense

LDS Apologetics Research

ABSTRACT

1. Introduction

Among the most common accusations leveled at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the charge that Latter-day Saints worship "a different Jesus" — a Jesus so theologically distinct from the Jesus of the Bible and historic Christianity that He is, in effect, a separate figure. Critics appeal to Paul's warning in 2 Corinthians 11:4 about "another Jesus, whom we have not preached" and argue that the Latter-day Saint Jesus — separate from the Father, embodied, the spirit brother of all humanity — is precisely the kind of counterfeit Jesus Paul warned against. If this argument succeeds, it places Latter-day Saint faith outside the boundaries of Christianity entirely. But the argument depends on equating a particular *theological interpretation* of Jesus with Jesus Himself — and on ignoring the degree to which the Latter-day Saint understanding of Christ is rooted in the New Testament text.

2. The Criticism (Steelmanned)

The strongest form of the argument proceeds as follows: Orthodox Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, eternally co-equal and consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father. He is not a created being but the eternal Creator. He is one in substance with the Father. Latter-day Saint theology, by contrast, teaches that Jesus is a separate being from the Father, that He has a physical body, that He was the firstborn spirit child of the Father, and that all human beings (and even Lucifer) are His spirit siblings. This is a fundamentally different Christ: not the eternal, uncreated God of Nicene Christianity but a progressed, embodied being who is separate from the Father in a way that the creeds explicitly deny. Paul warned against "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4), and if the Latter-day Saint Jesus differs in nature, origin, and relationship to the Father from the biblical Jesus, then Latter-day Saints are following precisely the counterfeit Paul described. A Jesus who is not fully God in the Nicene sense cannot save, because only God can bridge the infinite gap between Creator and creature.

This argument is theologically sophisticated. But it commits a fundamental error: it identifies a fourth-century creedal formulation with the biblical Jesus Himself, and then judges all other interpretations as worshipping "a different Jesus."

3. Biblical Response

The Identity of Jesus in the New Testament

The Latter-day Saint understanding of Jesus Christ affirms every core claim the New Testament makes about Him:

- **Jesus is the Son of God.** "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Latter-day Saints affirm this without qualification.
- **Jesus is the Creator.** "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Latter-day Saints affirm this.
- **Jesus is divine.** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Latter-day Saints affirm that Jesus is divine, a God, and one with the Father in purpose, power, and glory.
- **Jesus is the Savior and Redeemer.** "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" (John 3:16). This is the central claim of Latter-day Saint Christianity.
- **Jesus performed the Atonement.** His suffering in Gethsemane and death on the cross provide redemption from sin and resurrection from the dead for all humanity.
- **Jesus was physically resurrected.** "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).
- **Jesus will return in glory.** "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The Latter-day Saint Jesus is born of Mary, baptized by John, teaches the Sermon on the Mount, calls Twelve Apostles, performs miracles, suffers in Gethsemane, is crucified at Calvary, is resurrected on the third day, and ascends into heaven. This is the Jesus of the New Testament.

The "Different Jesus" Is a Creedal Jesus, Not a Biblical One

The differences between the Latter-day Saint and the evangelical understanding of Jesus are not about the biblical data but about the *philosophical interpretation* of that data. The key divergences are:

1. **Separate being vs. same substance.** Latter-day Saints teach that the Father and the Son are separate, distinct beings united in purpose, will, and glory. Critics say they must be one substance (*homoousios*). But the word *homoousios* does not appear in the Bible. It was adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD after intense debate and political maneuvering. The New Testament itself presents a picture more compatible with the Latter-day Saint view than critics acknowledge.
2. **The New Testament distinguishes the Father and the Son.** Jesus prays to the Father (John 17). He says "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). He says "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3) — distinguishing Himself from "the only true God." He cries from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) — addressing a Being distinct from Himself. At His baptism, the Father's voice speaks from heaven while the Son stands in the water and the Spirit descends as a dove (Matthew 3:16-17) — three distinct manifestations. Stephen sees "the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts

7:56) — two distinct beings in two distinct locations. These passages are more naturally read as describing two separate beings than as describing one substance.

3. **John 17 unity is unity of purpose, not substance.** Jesus prays "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21). The disciples are to be "one" in the same way the Father and Son are "one." If "one" means "one substance," then the disciples become one substance with God — which no Christian theology teaches. The oneness described is clearly relational: unity of purpose, will, love, and mission. This is exactly the Latter-day Saint understanding.

2 Corinthians 11:4 in Context

Paul's warning about "another Jesus" is addressed to the Corinthians who are being led astray by false apostles who preach a different gospel — specifically, a gospel that undermines Paul's authority and the message of grace. The "different Jesus" Paul warns against is not a Jesus with a different metaphysical relationship to the Father (a question Paul never addresses in this passage) but a Jesus preached by those who distort the gospel message itself. Using this verse to disqualify any Christology that differs from Nicene categories is anachronistic — Paul wrote 270 years before Nicaea and never used the philosophical terminology of the creeds.

The "Only God Can Save" Argument

Critics argue that if Jesus is not God in the full Nicene sense — *homoousios* with the Father — He cannot save. But this argument assumes a soteriological framework that the Bible does not articulate in those terms. The New Testament says Jesus saves because "God so loved the world" and gave His Son (John 3:16), because Jesus is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and because God "raised him from the dead" (Romans 10:9). The saving power of Christ is grounded in His divine calling, His atoning sacrifice, and the Father's will — not in a metaphysical formula about consubstantiality. Latter-day Saints affirm that Jesus is fully divine, the literal Son of God, possessed of all the attributes of godliness, and the only name "under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

4. Early Christian Evidence

Pre-Nicene Christology Was Diverse

The earliest Christians did not hold a uniform Christology identical to the Nicene Creed. The development of Trinitarian theology was a centuries-long process involving intense debate, competing formulations, and significant diversity.

The Apostolic Fathers (c. 90-150 AD) — Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp — express devotion to Christ as divine Lord and Savior without articulating the metaphysical categories of Nicaea. Their Christology is functional ("Jesus saves, Jesus is Lord") rather than ontological ("Jesus is *homoousios* with the Father").

Justin Martyr (c. 150 AD) described the Logos as "another God" (*allos theos*) distinct from the Father, numerically distinct though derived from the Father's will. He used language that would later be considered subordinationist: the Son is a "second God" subordinate to the Father (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 56, 128). Justin's Christology is closer to the Latter-day Saint view than to Nicene orthodoxy.

Tertullian (c. 200 AD) was the first to use the Latin *trinitas* but described the Son as subordinate to the Father: "The Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole" (*Against Praxeas*, 9). This subordinationist language would be condemned after Nicaea.

Origen (c. 230 AD) described the Son as a "second God" (*deuteros theos*) and taught that the Son's divinity was derived from and subordinate to the Father's (*Against Celsus*, 5.39; *Commentary on John*, 2.2). Origen's Christology, widely influential for a century, was later condemned as heterodox — demonstrating that Nicene Christology was not the original position but a later consensus.

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) adopted *homoousios* — a term many bishops resisted, that had been previously associated with heretical theology (Paul of Samosata), and that does not appear in scripture. The Nicene settlement was not a simple affirmation of "what Christians always believed" but a contested decision that took decades to become established.

Subordinationism Was the Earlier Position

The pre-Nicene trajectory is clear: the earliest Christologies were subordinationist — the Son is divine but derived from and subordinate to the Father. This is far closer to the Latter-day Saint position than to the Nicene formulation. The charge that Latter-day Saints worship "a different Jesus" because their Christology is not Nicene is historically backwards: it is the Nicene Christology that represents the later development.

5. LDS Doctrinal Position

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

- Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world, the Creator of all things under the Father's direction, and the only means of salvation.
- The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three distinct beings, united in purpose, will, power, and glory — one God in the sense of one perfectly unified divine presidency, not one substance.
- Jesus Christ has a glorified, resurrected body of flesh and bones. His resurrection is the prototype of universal resurrection.
- Jesus was the Firstborn of the Father in the spirit and the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh.
- All human beings are spirit children of God and therefore spiritual siblings of Christ. This does not diminish Christ's unique status — He alone is the Only Begotten, the Savior, the Creator, the Redeemer. Being siblings does not imply equality, just as Joseph's brothers were his siblings without being his equals in calling.
- The Book of Mormon is the most Christ-centered text in Latter-day Saint scripture, containing over 3,900 references to Jesus Christ in 6,607 verses. Its central message is that Jesus is "the Christ, the

Eternal God" (title page) who atones for the sins of the world.

6. Key Scriptures

Biblical

- **John 17:3** — "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" — Father and Son distinguished
- **John 14:28** — "My Father is greater than I"
- **John 17:21-22** — Oneness is relational: disciples to be "one" as Father and Son are "one"
- **Matthew 3:16-17** — Baptism: three distinct manifestations simultaneously
- **Acts 7:55-56** — Stephen sees the Son standing at the right hand of God — two distinct beings
- **Matthew 27:46** — "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" — addresses a distinct Being
- **John 1:1-3** — The Word is divine and is the Creator
- **John 3:16** — God gives His "only begotten Son" — relational distinction
- **Colossians 1:15** — Christ is "the firstborn of every creature" — language of primacy and preeminence
- **Acts 4:12** — No other name under heaven for salvation

Latter-day Saint

- **3 Nephi 11:7-11** — The Father introduces the Son; two distinct voices and persons
- **D&C 130:22** — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three distinct personages
- **Moses 1:6** — "I have a work for thee, Moses, my son; and thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten"
- **Book of Mormon Title Page** — Jesus Christ is "the Eternal God"

7. Objection Responses

"Your Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer."

All spirit children of God are spiritual siblings by definition. This does not make Jesus and Lucifer equals any more than a righteous heir and a rebellious outcast are equals because they share a parent. Jesus is the Firstborn, the Only Begotten, the Creator, and the Redeemer. Lucifer is a fallen son who rebelled. The "spirit brother" framing is designed to shock, but the underlying doctrine — that God is the Father of all spirits (Hebrews 12:9) — is biblical.

"Your Jesus is not eternal — He is a created being."

Latter-day Saints teach that Christ's intelligence is eternal and uncreated (D&C 93:29), that He is the Firstborn of the Father in the spirit, and that He is the Creator of worlds without number. He is called "the Eternal God" on the title page of the Book of Mormon. The Latter-day Saint position is that Christ

is divine, eternal in the relevant sense, and the unique Savior — not that He is a creature in the Arian sense.

"If Jesus is not homoousios with the Father, He can't save."

The New Testament never uses the word *homoousios* and never makes this soteriological argument. Salvation is accomplished through the Atonement — Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection — by the will and power of the Father. The Bible grounds salvation in what Christ *did*, not in a metaphysical formula about substance. Latter-day Saints affirm everything the Bible says about Christ's saving power.

"John 1:1 says Jesus IS God — same being."

"The Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Greek *kai theos en ho logos* uses *theos* without the article, which many scholars understand as qualitative: "the Word was divine" or "the Word was God in nature." Even granting the strongest reading, the verse also says the Word was *with* God — a relational distinction. You cannot be "with" yourself. The verse affirms both divinity and distinction — exactly the Latter-day Saint position.

"2 Corinthians 11:4 is about you."

Paul's "another Jesus" warning addresses false apostles preaching a distorted gospel in Corinth — not a future group with a different metaphysical Christology. Using this verse to disqualify the Latter-day Saint Christ requires reading Nicene categories into a letter written 270 years before Nicaea. The Latter-day Saint Jesus is the Jesus of the Gospels: born of Mary, baptized, crucified, resurrected, and returning in glory.

8. Conclusion

The charge that Latter-day Saints worship "a different Jesus" depends on identifying a specific creedal formulation — the Nicene definition of *homoousios* — with the biblical Jesus Himself. But the Nicene formulation is a fourth-century theological interpretation, not a biblical datum. The New Testament presents Jesus as the divine Son of God, distinct from the Father, the Creator, the Savior, the Redeemer — and Latter-day Saints affirm every one of these claims. The pre-Nicene Christians held Christologies far closer to the Latter-day Saint position than to the later creeds. The "different Jesus" argument ultimately reduces to: "Your philosophical interpretation of Jesus differs from ours, therefore your Jesus is false." But philosophical interpretations are not Jesus. The Jesus of the New Testament — who prayed to a Father distinct from Himself, who was seen standing at God's right hand, who atoned for the sins of the world — is the Jesus Latter-day Saints worship, follow, and testify of.

9. Further Reading

- [FAIR: Do Latter-day Saints Worship a Different Jesus?](#)

- [FAIR: The Nature of the Godhead](#)
- [FAIR: 2 Corinthians 11:4](#)