
Question Time — Who do we say that we are? --- by Elder Todd Smith

One of the challenges facing latter day Saints is articulating who we are. Many find themselves saying nothing or stumbling awkwardly when opportunity to explain our church is presented. Sometimes we find ourselves spending more time explaining who we are *not* than who we are.

In the Book of Mormon (III Nephi 12:20), the church is unsure of what they should call themselves. Christ's response was, "But if it be called in my name, then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel." Prefixes and suffixes seem to be of little consequence. The problem though is not in identifying ourselves as The Church of Jesus Christ. It lies in differentiating ourselves from the many other groups using the name of Christ. There seems to be no brand or one-word answer to fall back on. We do not have the opportunity to just say, "I'm Jewish, or Baptist, or Catholic."

So what should we say? If we follow the words of Christ, however we say it, the phrase "Church of Jesus Christ" should be included. Adding a prefix or suffix to further explain branch or group affiliation may be helpful, but isn't necessary. The terms Mormon, RLDS, COC, Remnant, Temple Lot, and yes, Restorationist, are all "brands" and certainly serve to help in identifying our group affiliation. Whatever brand we choose, we must not forget that we are the Church of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that the Lord wasn't troubled at all when dealing with the issue of the church name at the time of the reorganization. The key ingredient, His name, remained. Prefixes and suffixes may come and go, but the commandment is the same, "in my name."

From the time of the reorganization, confusion has been part of the landscape when dealing with our church name. Our problem is hardly new, but does contain new aspects requiring more explaining than before. I remember many times, while under the RLDS church, spending time detailing differences between the latter day saint churches to friends and acquaintances. We certainly have a task before us in articulating "Who we are," but it's the spirit within us ("built upon my gospel") that's critical to the task.

It would appear the glass is half-empty, but how we perceive things makes the difference. Having to explain about our church is an open door. Salesmen love an open door, and we should love the opportunity to share the gospel also. Our half-empty glass is really half-full, full of the opportunity to witness about Christ and the gospel.

Let's remind ourselves of several basics.

We are "The Church of Jesus Christ" and should say it with confidence because it's the truth. The Church is alive and well in our branches where authorized Priesthood practice the ordinances and sacraments of the Gospel in the manner intended by God, and we should be eager to share the good news.

We are called to "labor" in this world. It may seem tedious to field questions about "Who we are", but it is the work to which we are called. We are challenged to "be not weary in well doing." Go to work and prepare yourself for the questions that come after identifying yourself with The Church of Jesus Christ. Be ready to explain the differences between other groups and our own. Imagine yourself being questioned and see yourself responding in an intelligent and positive manner. Remember to not run other groups down. We are to have charity at all times. Point out the differences in a polite manner and let the hearer be the judge. Be prepared to give a brief but positive explanation of where the Church is today and how God is working in your life. We are, after all, called to be missionaries for Christ and it is our just service to work labor patiently with others that may not understand.

Fear not (a simple concept, but one that so often eludes us). In the communion prayer, the request is made "that they may always have his Spirit to be with them." God has not left us alone. There is a popular advertisement for a telecommunications company where an army of technicians follows the customer around, providing support. God's army is with you; visualizing this helps you remember you're not alone. The open door of "What church do you belong to?" is like a prepared field, waiting to have the seed sown with charity. Seize the opportunity and "thrust in your sickle with your might."

Finally, we all know that any group can claim to be Christ's church. Jesus said the church must be built on his gospel. So too, with us, the difference is in our actions and the spirit we carry with us. Let your actions reinforce your testimony, not cancel it out. The glass is half- full, full of opportunity to spread the good word. Let's embrace the open door before us and cheerfully be about our Father's business.

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