

## **Observations by J Neil Evans of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints book: "The Infinite Atonement" by Tad Callister**

Tad R. Callister has served in the Presidency of the Seventy and as a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy; Sunday School general president. He was also a full-time missionary in the Eastern Atlantic States Mission, a bishop, a stake president, a regional representative, a mission president, and an Area Seventy.

Books by Tad Mallister: -The Infinite Atonement; -A Case For The Book Of Mormon; -Teaching with Power; -Blueprint of Christ's Church; -The Inevitable Apostasy and The Promised Restoration; -Repentance: The Pathway To Perfection

Tad Callister's book titled "The Infinite Atonement" is regarded as definitive by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, even though it can be altered and regarded in any way by Revelations of any present or future LDS Prophet.

There are many things that a Bible believing person could disagree with in Mr Callister's book but a summary of them is found on pages 12,13 of the book. Here is a quote that represents many of the differences:

**“It seems paradoxical that the very doctrine that is essential to our salvation is also one of the least understood doctrines in the Christian world. The misunderstanding, confusion, and doctrinal heresies associated with this foundational doctrine and its precursor, the Fall, are rampant. The following are examples of such misconceptions taught by many in the Christian world today:”**

Here are the eight "misunderstandings, confusions, doctrinal heresies" he seeks to correct with LDS teachings regarding Christ's "atonement."  
(Each "misconception is in **bold** with my comments following.)

### **1. Adam and Eve would have had children in the Garden of Eden if they had been allowed to remain.**

In fifty years of being a Christian pastor, I have never heard this idea either promoted or discussed as an important issue. The only thing the Bible says is in Genesis where one of His instructions to Adam is to “be fruitful and multiply.” This instruction was before the Fall so it is a

reasonable assumption that they could have had children immediately in their innocent nature.

**2. Adam and Eve were not in a state of innocence in the Garden but rather were experiencing unparalleled joy.**

On the contrary, in my experience the overwhelming majority of Christians believe Adam and Eve were sinless and innocent in the Garden of Eden. In this statement Mr. Callister seems to be suggesting that many Christians believe that Adam and Eve were guilty of sin but still experiencing unparalleled joy. I know of no Biblical passage that says Adam and Eve were guilty of any sin before their interaction with the Serpent.

**3. The Fall was not part of God's master plan, but rather a tragic step backwards. It was a stumbling block, not a stepping stone in man's eternal journey.**

As I understand it, the LDS view of a "master plan" involves an eternal journey of progression from spirit child to Godhood, with many steps in-between, accomplished over eons of time. The Fall was one of the steps in that journey. The disobedience was rewarded rather than punished.

As I understand the Bible, God's "master plan" is illustrated by *Psalm 57:5* "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!" God desires to demonstrate His Glory for the eternal enjoyment of Himself and all the people who love Him. A major part of God's Glory is the demonstration of His Glory in the deliverance that was made necessary by the Fall. That part of God's plan is illustrated by *Psalm 79:9* "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!"

**4. If Adam had not fallen, all of Adam's children would have been born in a state of bliss, to live "happily every after" in Edenic conditions.**

I have never heard any Christians focusing on this idea, which has no bearing on our present lives given the reality that Adam and Eve did sin and we are not in Edenic conditions. Mr Callister apparently proposes this "misconception" as an impediment to the LDS exaltation to Godhood.

**5. Because of the Fall, all infants are tainted with original sin.**

The Bible does teach that everyone, including infants, are not just tainted with sin but unrighteous slaves of sin. All of us, apart from God's redeeming power working in us cannot do any good. This doesn't mean people can't do nice things from a human perspective, but that we cannot, and do not, in our own power do things for the glory of God. Apart from God we are fundamentally and naturally selfish putting ourselves rather than God first. Can anyone reasonably deny that even babies are thoroughly selfish? In the following Bible verses the words "all" and "none" are thoroughly inclusive. They include everyone including infants.

*Romans 3:9 "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,"*

*Romans 5:12 "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned —"*

*Psalms 53:3 "They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one."*

*Romans 3:10 "as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;"*

I do not believe, nor does the Bible state, that babies and infants go to hell if they die. The Bible does teach that God is both Just and Merciful. He knows and understands every persons circumstances and abilities and will do the Righteous and Loving thing with every single person. If a child dies before they are capable of understanding or responding to God's Grace, I believe they will be saved the same way as everyone else. All sin, including the sin of the young carries the penalty of death. The death of Jesus pays the penalty of all our sin. Our salvation is not based on the good works we do but the sacrificial atoning death of Jesus that God applies to our sin. This is clearly stated in *Titus 3:5 "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,."* This truth is further described in #6.

## **6. Grace alone can save (i.e., exalt) us, regardless of any works on our part.**

The Bible does not teach that Christians don't do any works, just that they follow not precede God's Grace.

Mr. Callister, in this item of "misunderstanding" reveals a fundamental, and very important, difference between LDS beliefs and traditional Christian Bible beliefs. By adding the parenthesis: "i.e., exalt," as an LDS definition of "save" he refers to the fact that LDS teachings about salvation focus on being saved "to" something, namely "exaltation, which is #8

godhood, largely ignoring that Biblical salvation of being saved “from” something, namely the wrath of God toward sin. In the index of his book there is no reference to any of the following Biblical words: wrath, anger, punishment, guilt, transgression, unrighteous. Furthermore, the word “gift,” clearly associated with our salvation in the New Testament, is not found in his book.

I believe the Bible teaches that God’s Grace applies the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Atonement) to my sin and forgives me as a gift. That gift begins with saving me “from” the penalty of God’s wrath and then proceeds toward the Biblical exaltation of Eternal Life in Christ Jesus. I “work” at obeying God as thanksgiving for this amazing gift, not to earn or deserve the salvation He has already given me.

**7. The physical resurrection of the Savior was merely symbolic; we will be resurrected as spirits without the “limitations” of a physical body.**

Like the other straw-man "heresies" this is not a common Christian belief, I certainly do not believe that the Bible teaches Jesus’ resurrection was merely symbolic. The Bible teaches we will have a resurrected physical body which will be new, and eternal. I believe that even now, in this temporary time we are each fundamentally and essentially spirit with a body that is doomed to death. When we are resurrected we will have new bodies that are different in some sort of ways that do not have the limitations of our current sin-corrupted bodies.

**8. The Atonement does not have the power to transform us into gods; in fact such a thought is blasphemous.**

Mr Callister acknowledges that the word atonement is not a Greek or Latin, (or Hebrew) word but an English word used to translate various Bible words. He describes atonement as “at-one-ment,” to be so completely at one “with” God, to be like God, to the ultimate extent that we can become Gods ourselves. As I understand the rest of the book he claims that the suffering of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and on the Cross graciously gives us the motivation and ability to obey God in the various ordinances and works that help us achieve a Godhood just like His.

Harper’s Bible Dictionary says: “The Hebrew word with which the concept of atonement is associated in the Old Testament can be translated

variously as 'purge,' 'cleanse,' 'expiate,' 'purify,' 'wipe on or off,' 'cover,' etc." The New Testament describes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as an effective substitution for the eternal death we deserve for our sin. That substitution satisfies God's Justice and makes possible God's forgiveness of our sin and the welcome to live in fellowship with Him now and for all eternity.

### **My Conclusions:**

Mr Callister says: "It seems paradoxical that the very doctrine that is essential to our salvation is also one of the least understood doctrines in the Christian world."

It is not so much "misunderstood in the Christian world," as it is that Christians see atonement in the Bible differently than he presents it from the perspective of various LDS authorities.

Mr Callister says: "The misunderstanding, confusion, and doctrinal heresies associated with this foundational doctrine and its precursor, the Fall, are rampant."

He simply describes the Fall and Atonement differently than what the Bible teaches and then says people who disagree misunderstand, are confused, and believe heresies.

These eight "examples of misconceptions taught by many in the Christian world today" are a combination of things not taught, not considered important, or in fact contradictions between the Bible and LDS teachings.

### **My Questions prompted by these eight ideas:**

1. What would have been bad about Adam and Eve having children in the Garden of Eden?
2. Why would God describe a place as "Very Good" if sin were there?  
Could, or can, sin-guilty people experience "unparalleled joy?"
3. If the Fall was a good thing, why did it require the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to atone for it?
4. What is wrong with living in sinless fellowship with God forever.
5. Why do babies die if they are not sinners under the penalty of death?

6. Considering the LDS phrase “we are saved by grace, after all we can do.”

Isn't there always more that we could do?

How do we know when we have done enough?

7. Aren't we already spirits living inside physical bodies?

Doesn't our salvation involve the redemption of both.

Don't you hope that you don't have to spend eternity with the “limitations of the physical bodies we now have?”

8. Have you read Isaiah 44:6-8?

God says: *“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts. (three different titles) I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. ... Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”*

Is not The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints polytheistic rather than monotheistic. Does the Church not teach that there are many Gods, and more people becoming Gods all the time?

How long will it take for you to become a God yourself?

Do you just have to keep keeping the commandments and ordinances you are doing now, or will there be more added as you progress?

*Romans 8:1* says we can be “*in Christ.*”

Do you consider yourself “*in Christ Jesus*”?

If so, on what basis?

*Romans 7:24–8:8*

*24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

*25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

*1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus.***

*2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free **in Christ Jesus** from the law of sin and death.*

*3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,*

*4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

*5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*

*6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

*7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*

*8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Speaking at the April 2019 General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tad Callister said:

"Because the Savior performed His Atonement, there is no external force or event or person—no sin or death or divorce—that can prevent us from achieving exaltation, provided we keep God's commandments. With that knowledge, we can press forward with good cheer and absolute assurance that God is with us in this heavenly quest."

LDS have numerous impossible doctrines. Key among them is the five-word phrase Mr Callister used in his talk: "provided we keep God's commandments." Only One man has ever truly "kept God's Commandments." Jesus sacrificed His Life on the Cross to "atone" (substitute, pay for, redeem, propitiate) for the sin of all who accept it as a gift, recognizing that to pursue Eternal Life as a working "quest," is hopeless. I can say with confidence (because I can say it about myself and every other person I have known or read about) that neither Tad Callister, nor any LDS Authority, including every President, Prophet and Revelator, ever has, or does, adequately (perfectly) keep God's Commandments.

It is true that there are misunderstandings and doctrinal heresies regarding Biblical Sin, Atonement, Forgiveness, Eternal Life, and many other thousands-of-years-old Bible truths. Many of those heresies are found in the two-hundred years of counterfeit teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Mr Callister's "Infinite Atonement" is a prime example of such misrepresentation of Bible Truth.