

Mormon Doctrine

What's Official, And What Isn't?

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The 14 million members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are spread across 160 countries on 6 continents. Yet there is a remarkable consistency in beliefs, attitudes, teachings and practices among Mormons everywhere. A traveler visiting congregations throughout the world will find familiar curricula materials, beliefs, and attitudes on most every religious topic.

Yet Mormonism is not dogmatic. There is no creed or statement of core beliefs which adherents are obliged to accept. Both members and leaders alike hold varying opinions ranging from whether watching TV on Sunday is sinful, to whether every statement by a General Authority must be explicitly and unconditionally obeyed.

Such questions may be insignificant or disquieting. If a person is struggling with faith issues, it may become important to distinguish between Official Doctrine and less authoritative council. A clear understanding of Official Doctrine can reduce controversy, minimize anxiety and perhaps open up new options for resolving faith issues. This essay attempts to evaluate the authoritativeness of council ranging from canonized scripture to conventional wisdom.

What Is Official Doctrine, and How Is It Established?

One of the best-kept secrets in Mormondom is "What is Official Doctrine, and how is it established." Church leaders seldom discuss the process, because Official Doctrine is rarely introduced. Yet Church history reveals a clearly established procedure that has been carefully followed for over 180 years. D&C 28:13 explains "all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith." Since the Church was founded in 1830, new doctrine has been accepted six times. On every occasion, a three-step process was followed to add Official Doctrine: It requires the approval of the First Presidency, the concurrence of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, and then it must be accepted in a sustaining vote of the entire membership.

Only then is it binding on the membership of the Church. The change will then be made to the body of accepted (canonized) scriptures. Those occasions are:

- 1) 1830 Bible and Book of Mormon were officially accepted with the organization of the Church
- 2) 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, first 103 sections were officially accepted
- 3) 1880 Doctrine and Covenants additional 32 sections were accepted along with the Pearl of Great Price
- 4) 1890 Polygamy was repealed (Official Declaration, p. 291)
- 5) 1976 D&C sections 137 & 138 were officially accepted
- 6) 1978 The priesthood was made available to all worthy males regardless of race. (Official Declaration 2, p. 292)

Also, in 1921 the Church removed the *Lectures on Faith* from the Doctrine and Covenants, with the explanation that they were never presented to the Church as being divinely revealed scripture. As

lectures and lessons, it was determined that they simply did not measure up to standard of Official Doctrine.¹

Elder B.H. Roberts explained what Official Doctrine is:

*The Church has confined the sources of doctrine by which it is willing to be bound before the world to the things that God has revealed, and which the Church has officially accepted, and those alone. These would include the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price; these have been repeatedly accepted and endorsed by the Church in general conference assembled, and are the only sources of absolute appeal for our doctrine.*²

An example of this process was in 1880 when President George Q. Cannon presented the Pearl of Great Price and 32 additional sections of the Doctrine and Covenants;

*I hold in my hand the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and also the book, The Pearl of Great Price, which books contain revelations of God. In Kirtland, the Doctrine and Covenants in its original form, as first printed, was submitted to the officers of the Church and the members of the Church to vote upon. As there have been additions made to it by the publishing of revelations which were not contained in the original edition, it has been deemed wise to submit these books with their contents to the conference, to see whether the conference will vote to accept the books and their contents as from God, and binding upon us as a people and as a Church.*³

Mormons commonly assume official publications, policies, procedures, pronouncements, and pontifications are Official Doctrine. While they are necessary and important for the running of the Church, they don't meet the standard Elder Roberts described above as something "...the Church is willing to be bound before the world to the things that God has revealed, and which the Church has officially accepted."

More recently (2007) the Church issued a press release defining Official Doctrine as established by "The First Presidency ... and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles... counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications. This doctrine resides in the four "standard works" of scripture (the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price)." ⁴

This is a singular standard that the Church has held since its founding for officially binding doctrine. Everything else is, by definition, less official, less authoritative. President Harold B. Lee explains,

*"It is not to be thought that every word spoken by the General Authorities is inspired, or that they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost in everything they write. I don't care what his position is, if he writes something or speaks something that goes beyond anything that you can find in the standard church works."*⁵

There are five items often assumed to be Official Doctrine, but fail the above standard. They are

- Official talks and statements
- Official publications
- Official policy and procedure
- Books by General Authorities
- Conventional wisdom.

Following is a discussion of these five items plus a discussion of Eternal Truth. Following that are some suggestions for how with the Lord's help we can responsibly comport our lives, being responsible for our own feelings, thoughts and actions.

Official Talks and Statements by General Authorities Are Not Official Doctrine

While many members say statements by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are Official Doctrine, history shows GA's statements occasionally are not reliable.

- Several GA's taught that polygamy is essential for salvation and would never be removed from the Church. ⁶
- Brigham Young vigorously taught the Adam-God theory, though Church leaders since have repeatedly disavowed it. ⁷
- Several GA's from Brigham Young to Bruce R McConkie taught the Blacks would never get the Priesthood. ⁸
- Joseph Fielding Smith said man would never set foot on the moon. ⁹
- Apostle Franklin D. Richards promised the Martin and Wiley handcart companies the Lord would protect them on their journey so they would arrive unscathed. Nevertheless, 200+ died in route. ¹⁰

Infallibility of prophets and apostles is not, nor has it ever been, a doctrine of the Church. They are wise men, with many decades of life experience, and enjoy a special relationship with God because of their callings. While their guidance is quite valuable, God has not absolved them from the weaknesses of mortality, nor does He eliminate all errors in their understanding and judgment. They must be tried and tested like everyone else, and they make mistakes both trivial and sometimes tragic like everyone else.

The fallibility of God's leaders is not unique to the "latter days." The Old and New Testaments are replete with examples of similar errors. Here are a few examples: ¹¹

- Noah got drunk, (Genesis 9:21)
- Abraham lied, (Genesis 12:12-18)
- Moses' was proud, (Numbers 20:12)
- Circumcision is an eternal covenant, (Genesis 17:13)
- Apostles' lack of faith as Christ quiets the storm, (Mark 4:35-41)
- Peter denied Christ three times, (Matthew 26:69-75)
- Thomas refuses to believe Christ is resurrected until he sees with his eyes and feels the wounds, (John 20:24-29)
- Millennium to come within "this generation", (Luke 21:24-27, 32)

Prophets and apostles have never been perfect, nor have their statements however strongly stated. That is not their calling, that is not their role.

Their role is to teach of Christ, and to call people to repentance.

Official Teachings & Publications Are Not Official Doctrine

The Church publishes a variety of books, videos, magazines, etc. for the religious instruction for its members. Instructional manuals are prepared for seminary and institute classes, Sunday church classes, missionary materials, and General Conference addresses, among others.

Since 1972, they have been prepared by the Church Correlation Committee to insure consistency, simplicity and orthodoxy. The resulting institutional mindset has devolved to the lowest common denominator. The same lesson is presented to a sixth-generation Mormon living on Bountiful East Bench who's served a mission, been a Bishop, Stake President, etc, as a new member in a brand new branch in Bangkok, Thailand. The result is that profound spiritual principles are homogenized and watered down.

Official Policy Is Not Official Doctrine

Like any organization, the Church has a need to set policy so consistency and direction can be established. Occasionally these policies incorrectly take on the aura of Official Doctrine.

- *The Family, Proclamation to the World* is not official doctrine because it has not been approved by the membership. But this very formal statement on the family unequivocally states, "Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan". In the very heated California Proposition 8 campaign in 2008 a sizable majority of members followed the Church's prompting to campaign against gay marriage. The Church authorities censured no members who opposed their stand against gay marriage. ¹²
- President McKay had a personal dislike for crucifixes and directed the Church building committee to not use them, though they had been used earlier. But once initiated in the Church Building Committee, 50 years later, his personal preference has taken on a life of its own. Some GA's even speculate on theological reasons without regard to its history. ¹³
- President Heber J. Grant, in 1921, made abstinence from the four forbidden WofW items a requirement for a temple recommend. But there is no claim to any revelation as a basis for the change. ¹⁴
- Temple Recommend questions are thought to be a constant guide for the faithful, yet they change every few years. In the 19th century, temple goers were asked if they maintained proper fences to prevent their cows from wandering into a neighbor's field. ¹⁵
- GA's consistently taught that the Lamanites were the *primary* ancestors of the American Indians. In 2007, the introduction to the Book of Mormon changed to stating Lamanites were *among* the ancestors of American Indians.

Books Written by General Authorities Are Not Official Doctrine

Many books are written by the general authorities to help us understand gospel principles and practices. They can be very helpful, but care should be used with the usual caveat to distinguish between their private opinions and teachings of the canonized scriptures. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained:

“Though general authorities are authorities in the sense of having power to administer church affairs, they may or may not be authorities in the sense of doctrinal knowledge, the intricacies of church Procedures, or the receipt of the promptings of the Spirit. A call to an administrative position of itself adds little knowledge or power of discernment to an individual, although every person called to a position in the Church does grow in grace, knowledge, and power by magnifying the calling given him.”¹⁶

Conventional Wisdom Is Not Official Doctrine

There are lots of things many people erroneously believe are Official Doctrine. Among them are:

- To be a good member, you must be a Republican.
- Caffeinated soft drinks, chocolate bars, etc. are forbidden, along with coffee.
- GA's will never lead you wrong. You will be perfectly safe if you follow what they say.
- Temple garments will protect you from physical harm. You will be safe from hazards like fire or chemical burns wherever and whenever you are covered.
- Always trust Church leaders advice over such “worldly types” like psychologists, social workers, philosophers, scientists of various disciplines, and other intellectuals.
- If you go to church, say your prayers, pay your tithing, accept church callings, the Lord will bless you so you will have no serious problems.

Like the Pharisees and Sadducees of the Bible, some people are so obsessive fulfilling the letter of the law that they forget the spirit of the law. They teach the lesson, but ignore the student. They are so busy with church work, that they have little time for their own children. They are so set on arguing their religion that they alienate people. In their zeal to be right, they fail to be good. We must not let them draw us away from that which is good, true and enduring in the gospel.

Official Doctrine Is Not Eternal Truth

Official Doctrine is not Eternal Truth, but only approximations of it. We should not be surprised to see it change and develop as our circumstances and capabilities change.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55: 9)

So the Lord must speak to our level of understanding and our willingness to learn,

“For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.” (2 Ne. 28: 30)

*“I do not write anything upon plates save it be that I think it be sacred. And now, if I do err...I would excuse myself ... because of the weakness which is in me, according to the flesh.”
(1 Nephi 19: 6, 20)*

Learning Eternal Truths is an evolving process between man and God. As the ninth Article of Faith says, *“We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.”*

He will reveal truths to us only when we are ready. God will force no truths upon us. Nor should we ever try to pressure anyone to accept our understanding of the Gospel. As a hymn *“Every Soul Is Free”* says,

*“Know this, that ev'ry soul is free
To choose his life and what he'll be;
For this eternal truth is giv'n:
That God will force no man to heav'n.
He'll call, persuade, direct aright,
And bless with wisdom, love, and light,
In nameless ways be good and kind,
But never force the human mind.”*¹⁷

We must all struggle with the limitations of human language as we try to convey spiritual truths. That leads to a couple of problems. First, spiritual truths are frequently subtle, nuanced and simply cannot be expressed in human language. For example, how would you convey an understanding of love to those who have never experienced it? Likewise many spiritual truths can only be understood when experienced through personal revelation.

Second, language presents a challenge in any large organization. The Church has a set of policy, procedures, pronouncements and pontifications which go out to 14 million members in 160 different countries. One size frequently must fit all. Something inevitably gets lost in the translation even when everyone speaks English.

For example, some years ago President Kimball encouraged members to take pride in their homes and properties. He encouraged them to paint their fences. Some people lost sight of the principle he was encouraging, and got caught up in his example. I overheard a sister overwrought that she had no fence to paint. She fretted about the impossibility of being obedient.

For these and many other reasons, the “fullness of the everlasting gospel” does not give us a perfect understanding of all eternal truths. Individually and collectively we are left with the responsibility to *“work out our salvation with fear and trembling.”* Philippians 2:12 Finding eternal truth is not easy. Our understanding of it will evolve and develop over time, just as scientific truths evolve and change over time.

Also, this human and limited understanding should give us insight to how speculation, particularly of the early Brethren, can result in conclusions that sound to us absurd, like Adam-God theory or the teachings about Blood Atonement.

The Dilemma

General Authorities validate scriptural truths, while the scriptures validate GA's statements. That is a chicken-and-an-egg dilemma with no solution.

Any perceived inconsistency among the various voices in the Church can and does cause discomfort for some. Mormonism values unity of faith and a firm belief in the restoration of the one and only true Church of Jesus Christ. What can we do when challenged by inconsistencies and/or disharmony?

Personal Responsibility and Stewardship

Much of the perceived inconsistencies can be resolved by understanding that Church authorities have a unique stewardship. When they speak, they are talking to 14 million members in 160 different countries. As leaders of any large institution know, they must speak with one voice to their followers. It is impossible to address 14 million different personalities and situations. That's where personal responsibility and stewardship comes in.

It is up to us individually to tailor those messages to our own private stewardships. Most of us have family, Church, career and perhaps community responsibilities. We must translate those principles into practice so that it works for ourselves and those we affect.

We must decide what applies and what doesn't, what needs to be adjusted, when no compromise should be allowed, where value judgments are to be made, and how.

This isn't easy, and it should not be thought of as a cafeteria plan of salvation. While we are free to choose what commandments we obey, we are not free to escape the natural consequences.

There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated. And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated. (D&C 130:20)

Nevertheless, we can't just take a canned set of gospel fixes off the shelf to solve our problems. We cannot expect to achieve exaltation by just doing *religion-by-the-numbers*. Stories from the scriptures all confirm that one size doesn't fit all. Consider Noah, Moses, Abraham; and Thomas, Peter, Judas; and Nephi, Alma, Moroni; and Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Paul Dunn. They all had widely different circumstances, opportunities and challenges, so they received divine guidance for their particular needs and circumstances. Some paid attention and succeeded while others ignored it at their peril.

We can learn valuable lessons by understanding the principles guiding their lives but it would be folly to assume specific directives to them are necessarily applicable to us. While Nephi was counseled of the Lord that it is "*better that one man should perish than a nation should dwindle in unbelief*" (1 Nephi 3:14), yet few will ever have a similar situation. We must search out our own path consistent with gospel principles. Scriptures teach, and the Church reinforces, that the Lord often helps, not by solving our problems, but helping to strengthen us to work out the solutions by ourselves.

Joseph Smith taught an important doctrine when asked how he was able to govern so many people in such perfect order, especially since no one else could do it. He answered simply, "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves." ¹⁸

Our responsibility is to seek divine guidance as we apply correct principles in our lives. Moroni 10:4-5 promises God's help to those who seek wisdom and understanding, and James 1:5 reminds us of God's willingness to give wisdom to anyone who seeks it. The right to personal revelation is an important distinguishing doctrine of the Church, and is the cornerstone of the missionary message that every member has the right and responsibility to apply. But we each have to learn to use the Gift of the Holy Ghost.

Elder Douglas L. Callister observed, "*In the genius of the gospel plan, there ultimately only has to be one witness, but that witness must be you. The testimony of others may initiate and*

nourish the desire for faith and testimony, but eventually every individual must find out for himself. None can permanently endure on borrowed light.” ¹⁹

When asked our opinion, it is second best to respond with “my Church / my Bishop/ my Sunday school teacher says....” Relying solely on authorities, we can easily become, “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” (Ephesians 4:14)

Elder Dieter Uchtdorf has counseled that

“We are a question-asking people. We have always been, because we know that inquiry leads to truth. That is how the Church got its start, from a young man who had questions. In fact, I’m not sure how one can discover truth without asking questions. In the scriptures you will rarely discover a revelation that didn’t come in response to a question.... Inquiry is the birthplace of testimony. “Some might feel embarrassed or unworthy because they have searching questions regarding the gospel, but they needn’t feel that way. Asking questions isn’t a sign of weakness. It’s a precursor of growth.” ²⁰

President Brigham Young said,

“the greatest fear I have is that the people of this Church will accept what we say as the will of the Lord without first praying about it and getting the witness within their own hearts that what we say is the word of the Lord.” ²¹

President Harold B. Lee said,

“We can know or have the assurance that they (the Prophet and Apostles) are speaking under inspiration if we so live that we can have a witness that what they are speaking is the word of the Lord. There is only one safety, and that is that we shall live to have the witness to know.” ²²

In Conclusion

We have been given a system of checks and balances to guide us through life’s challenges. There are “Three Witnesses” to God’s will:

- Canonized scriptures
- Prophets and apostles
- Personal revelation

The witness of the scriptures, prophets and apostles are readily available witnesses, and they provide a firm foundation for our spiritual growth. Personal revelation may be the most difficult witness to seek, but it addresses our unique circumstances, needs and abilities. No one can do it for us.

Personal revelation is the most important witness, because it is the only way we can correctly evaluate the other two. Blind obedience even to the authority of scripture or prophets can ultimately lead to authoritarianism. Without personal revelation, we risk becoming mere puppets on a string, *tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:11-16) from within and without the Church.

For some, that personal witness comes quickly, and for others it may take months or perhaps years. But there is middle ground between ignorance and the “sure word of prophecy.” We can apply the gospel principles to our lives, and as Joseph Smith explained we can come to “govern ourselves”. We

can know from personal experience the fruits of the gospel. Following the Word of Wisdom can help us avoid several addictions and illnesses. Obeying our temple covenants can strengthen our marriage vows. Accepting Church callings can teach us about service and compassion. Living the Beatitudes can make us kinder, gentler people and more open to the Spirit. A positive personal experience with gospel principles can hold us in good stead while waiting for the personal witness. The line between personal experience and personal revelation can become so thin that it is impossible to distinguish them. In fact, it may be different ends on the same continuum.

Disclaimer

I have made every effort to be as accurate as possible to represent the teachings of the Church. Nevertheless, I am presenting only my understanding. The official website for the Church is www.lds.org I encourage you to prayerfully search these things for yourself.

Footnotes

¹ Lectures on Faith

http://en.fairmormon.org/Doctrine_and_Covenants/Lectures_on_Faith_removed#endnote_D&C1

² Official Doctrine

Brigham H. Roberts, sermon of 10 July 1921, delivered in Salt Lake Tabernacle, printed in Deseret News (23 July 1921) sec. 4:7.

³ Official Doctrine

George Q. Cannon, sermon of 15 November 1880, as reported in the Millennial Star 42 (15 November 1880): 724.

⁴ Official Doctrine,

LDS Church press release

<http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/approaching-mormon-doctrine>

⁵ GA's consistent with Standard Works

Elder Harold B. Lee, Stand Ye In Holy Places, pp. 162-3, "The Prophet, Seer, and Revelator," Address delivered to seminary and institute teachers, BYU, July 8, 1964.

⁶ Polygamy

<http://www.mormonwiki.org/Polygamy>

⁷ Adam God Theory

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam%E2%80%93God_theory

⁸ Blacks and the Priesthood

http://en.fairmormon.org/Blacks_and_the_priesthood/Origin_of_the_priesthood_ban

- ⁹ Man on the moon
May 14, 1961 - Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith address to stake conference in Honolulu
- ¹⁰ Handcart companies
<http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2006/10/levi-savage-and-obedience-to-church-authorities/>
- ¹¹ Bible prophets also made human mistakes
Information adapted from a book by Michael Hickenbotham, "Answering Challenging Mormon Questions." His book is available at
<http://www.cedarfort.com/author/Hickenbotham.html#%7Bselector%3A%22ldsba-body%22%2Cmodule%3A%22ldsba/productDetail.module%22%2Cparameters%3A%7Bproduct%3A%22345%22%7D%7D>
- ¹² Support of gay marriage tolerated
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96405866>
<http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=8624086>
- ¹³ Crucifix
<http://blog.mrm.org/2009/05/no-cross-protocol/> For more information, see
<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/religion/2336661/posts>
- ¹⁴ Word of Wisdom
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_of_Wisdom#cite_note-46
- ¹⁵ Temple Recommend
<http://mormonmatters.org/2009/02/16/temple-recommend-questions-by-guest-aaron-reeves/>
- ¹⁶ G A's fallibility
Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd Edition, p 309 in a discussion of General Authorities
- ¹⁷ Every soul is free
Know This, That Every Soul Is Free, p.240- Anonymous. Included in the first LDS hymnbook and all since, 1835. (1985 LDS); Also found at
http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?hideNav=true&locale=0&sourceId=ed3e8ceb1ec20110VgnVCM10000176f620a___&vgnnextoid=198bf4b13819d110VgnVCM1000003a94610aRCRD
- ¹⁸ Let them rule themselves
<http://www.prophetjosephsmith.org/teachings/chapter-21-30/leading>
John Taylor, "The Organization of the Church," *Millennial Star*, Nov. 15, 1851, p. 339.
- ¹⁹ Not on borrowed light
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51179/Elder-Douglas-L-Callister.html>
- ²⁰ We are a question asking people
<http://www.keepapitchinin.org/2009/11/12/pres-uchtdorf-%E2%80%9Cis-it-all-right-to-have-questions-about-the-church-or-its-doctrine%E2%80%9D/>
- ²¹ His greatest fear
Brigham Young, *Deseret News*, 9 Dec. 1857, 317; 12 Feb. 1862, 257, as quoted by Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye In Holy Places*, pp. 162-3. <http://lds-hist.hplx.net/lds-hist/Inspiration.html>

²² Holy Ghost to confirm message of GA's
Harold B. Lee, Stand Ye In Holy Places, pp. 162-3, "The Prophet, Seer, and Revelator,"
Address delivered to seminary and institute teachers, BYU, July 8, 1964)
<http://lds-hist.hplx.net/lds-hist/Inspiration.html>

Post Script

There are several topics worth discussing along with Official Doctrine that don't belong in the above essay. Here are four of them.

Purpose of This Essay

This essay is primarily written for people who are struggling to stay in the Church and have questions that are difficult to answer. As the Internet is making more information available, challenges can come from any number of subjects such as Church history, theology, science, archeology and life experience.

Faith is a very personal matter. It can steel us for some of life's most difficult challenges. But by definition, faith is something that cannot be proven to the satisfaction of a scientist or a court of law. Because it is so much involved with the purpose and direction of our lives, questioning and challenging it is often inevitable. Having questions about faith as a teenager, young adult, or even an adult with a grown family is not unusual for Mormons or Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, or any other belief system. It is normal to have questions. Questions lead to answers and increased faith and understanding.

James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*

James Fowler has written a very helpful book for those who find themselves struggling with their faith. It is called "Stages of Faith". The struggle can be very painful, and seem to those going through it that it is never ending. Based on studying thousands of people he shows that many can get through that stage to a very satisfactory place where they are no longer troubled, but can build a positive relationship with their church and their God.

While this is a gross over-simplification of Fowler's study, you can find more at the following links:

A very brief description of the Stages of Faith:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stages_of_faith_development

A couple of longer, more detailed summaries of the Fowler Stages of Faith:
<http://faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/fowler.htm>

<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/2219.htm>

StayLDS.com an Internet Forum

If you or some you know is struggling with staying in the Church, check out this site. This forum is available for people to discuss concerns and struggles with faith. Honest expressions of concern are encouraged, but the discussion is conducted in a positive and uplifting atmosphere of tolerance without judgment:

www.staylds.com/

A discussion of how the folks at StayLDS.com use James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*:

<http://www.staylds.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=557>

Clerical Corrections, Introduction, Chapter Summaries, Footnotes, and an Index to the Canonized Scriptures Are Not a Change to Official Doctrine

It should be noted also that many changes made to correct spelling, grammar, specific facts, and the like have had no substantial effect on Official Doctrine. Critics of the Church like to say there are several thousand changes to the Mormon canon that belie its divine origin. While some may appear to change the doctrinal meaning of a given verse, collectively or individually they still do not change the Official Doctrine of the Church:

<http://www.lightplanet.com/response/answers/dc-changes.htm>

For more information, see

http://www.lightplanet.com/mormons/book_of_mormon/book_of_mormon.html

"In 1981 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published its most current edition of the Book of the Mormon, the first since 1920, with additions to aid the reader. Chapter summaries, footnotes, an introduction, an index and other information — all of which are not considered scripture — were added or expanded to help the reader navigate through the book and compare scriptures in the Old and New Testaments." As quoted from

<http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/news-releases-stories/understanding-the-process-of-publishing-the-book-of-mormon>

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