

TRUTH

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Truth (Oh Say, What is Truth?) | VOLUME: Pearl of Great Price (1851 Edition) | AUTHOR: John Jaques

OVERVIEW

This text, originally a poem by John Jaques included in the 1851 Pearl of Great Price (and later canonized as a hymn), articulates a distinctively Mormon ontology of Truth. It defines Truth not merely as factual accuracy or divine revelation, but as the 'sum of existence'—an eternal, independent reality that survives the collapse of earthly systems. Crucially, the text elevates Truth above deity in a functional sense, describing it as a prize to which 'Gods can aspire.' This reflects the developing Mormon theology of the mid-19th century, which moved away from classical theism (God as the uncreated source of Truth) toward a cosmology where God and Truth are co-eternal, or where Godhood is attained through the mastery of eternal laws of Truth. The poem emphasizes the durability of Truth against tyranny and time, framing the believer's journey as an infinite pursuit of knowledge that spans the heavens and the depths.

KEY FIGURES

John Jaques (Author), Gods (Plural), Mortals, The Despot/Tyrant

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PLURALITY OF GODS

Assertion: There are multiple Gods who actively aspire to higher truth.

"'Tis the brightest prize / To which mortals or Gods can aspire'"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly references 'Gods' in the plural, placing them in a category alongside mortals as beings who 'aspire' to truth. In Evangelical theology, there is only one Being of God (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 43:10). Furthermore, the Evangelical God does not 'aspire' to truth; He *is* the Truth (John 14:6) and possesses all knowledge (Omniscience) inherently, not as a prize to be won.

2. ETERNAL PROGRESSION / THE NATURE OF GOD

Assertion: God is a being who pursues truth rather than being the uncreated source of it.

"'Tis the brightest prize / To which... Gods can aspire'"

Evangelical Comparison: By stating that Gods 'aspire' to truth, the text implies a theology of Eternal Progression, where deity is a status earned or maintained by acquiring knowledge. This contrasts sharply with the Classical Theistic and Evangelical view of God's Aseity (self-existence) and Immutability. In the Bible, God does not search for truth; He reveals it. This text suggests Truth is an objective reality independent of God that even He must master.

3. MATERIALITY/TOTALITY OF TRUTH

Assertion: Truth is defined as the 'sum of existence' encompassing all time and matter.

"Truth, the sum of existence, will weather the worst"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism views Truth primarily as the person of Jesus Christ and the revelation of God's character/word (John 17:17). This text defines Truth as 'the sum of existence'—a comprehensive collection of all facts, matter, and history ('last and first'). This aligns with later Mormon scripture (D&C 93:24) defining truth as knowledge of things as they are, were, and are to come, emphasizing an accumulation of intelligence over a relational knowledge of the Savior.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in Theology Proper (the doctrine of God). The text elevates 'Truth' to a position of supreme sovereignty that even 'Gods' must aspire to. This implies that God is not the ultimate reality, but rather a being subject to the laws of truth/existence. Evangelicalism asserts that God is the

Uncaused Cause and that Truth is an attribute of His nature, not an external prize He chases. Additionally, the plural usage 'Gods' explicitly validates Mormonism's henotheistic/polytheistic cosmology, which is irreconcilable with Biblical Monotheism (Isaiah 44:6).

Shared Values:

Truth is valuable above riches; Truth is eternal; Truth will triumph over tyranny/injustice

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Monotheism) – Explicit reference to 'Gods' (plural) validates polytheism.
2. [Critical] Theology Proper (Aseity/Omniscience) – Claims Gods 'aspire' to truth, denying God's absolute perfection and self-sufficiency.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Defines truth as the 'sum of existence' (universal knowledge) rather than the specific revelation of God in Scripture.

Semantic Warnings:

"Truth"

In Text: The sum of existence; an eternal independent reality comprising all facts and matter.

Evangelical: The self-disclosure of God; the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:6); conformity to God's reality.

Example: *In this text, truth is a 'prize' Gods aspire to. In the Bible, God is the 'God of Truth' (Psalm 31:5) by nature, not aspiration.*

"Gods"

In Text: Plural exalted beings who are still aspiring/progressing.

Evangelical: False idols or magistrates (in limited contexts), never used to describe the true Deity in a way that implies multiple true Gods.

Example: *The text refers to 'mortals or Gods' as a spectrum of beings on a similar quest.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as the acquisition of truth/intelligence to reach the status of 'Gods'.

How Attained: Through the 'pursuit' and 'search' for truth (works of the intellect and will).

Basis of Assurance: The endurance of the 'pillar of truth' one has acquired.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses entirely on the *pursuit* and *aspiration* for truth as the mechanism for advancement ('aim for the noblest desire'). There is no mention of grace, atonement, or faith as the means of reaching the 'brightest prize.' It is a soteriology of ascent through knowledge (Gnosticism) rather than justification by faith.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go search in the depths
2. Ascend in pursuit to the loftiest skies

Implicit Obligations:

1. Dedicate one's life to the accumulation of knowledge
2. Value truth above worldly wealth ('monarch's costliest diadem')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The hymn mentions that truth is a prize 'Gods can aspire' to. In your understanding, is God still learning new truths today?
2. If truth is the 'sum of existence,' does that mean God is subject to the laws of existence, or did He create them?

3. How does the idea of 'Gods' (plural) in this text fit with passages like Isaiah 43:10 which says 'Before me no God was formed, nor shall there be any after me'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Unshakable Foundation – Humans long for something that won't change or fail when 'winds of stern justice' blow. Jesus describes Himself as that foundation. [Matthew 7:24-25 (The Wise Builder) and Hebrews 13:8 ('Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever').]

Spiritual Weight:

1. The Burden of Infinite Progression [Severe] – If Godhood is attained by aspiring to truth, the believer is placed on an infinite treadmill of acquiring knowledge to become like God. There is no 'finished work' or rest, only an eternal 'pursuit' to the 'loftiest skies.'
2. Intellectualism/Gnosticism [Moderate] – Defining truth as the 'sum of existence' places a burden on the believer to understand all mysteries of the universe to be fully sanctified, rather than resting in the simple sufficiency of Christ's cross.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Universal search (depths/skies) and accumulation of facts ('sum of existence').

Verification Method: Endurance testing (weathering the worst) and intrinsic value assessment.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology centers on revelation from God through Scripture and the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). This text suggests a gnostic-like ascent ('ascend in pursuit') where the individual (or God) actively hunts for truth in the universe.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1851 (Published in the first edition of Pearl of Great Price)

Authorship: John Jaques (British convert and LDS historian)

Textual Issues: While authored by Jaques, its inclusion in the Pearl of Great Price (canonized scripture) gives it doctrinal weight beyond a mere hymn.