

**Evaluating LDS Prophetic Authority:
A Biblical and Historical Response to Timothy R. Berman**

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March 12, 2026

The Question of Prophetic Authority

Timothy R. Berman recently published a blog post titled “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks.” In the article, Berman attempts to dismantle the arguments presented by Bill Young of the Truth to Mormons ministry and to defend the teachings of President Dallin H. Oaks. While the article presents itself as a logical and scriptural rebuttal, closer examination reveals significant weaknesses in Berman’s reasoning and interpretation. Rather than successfully refuting Young’s critique, Berman’s article illustrates many of the underlying tensions between Latter-day Saint theology and the teachings of the Bible.

The debate addressed in Berman’s article reflects a broader scholarly discussion concerning the historical origins and theological claims of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Historians and scholars of religion have long noted that Mormonism emerged within the unique religious environment of nineteenth-century America and developed doctrines that differ substantially from historic Christian theology. Historian Jan Shipps, for example, describes Mormonism as a “new religious tradition” that introduced theological concepts distinct from those found in classical Christian orthodoxy (Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, 5). Similarly, Richard Lyman Bushman observes that Joseph Smith’s movement developed within the broader context of American revivalism while gradually producing doctrines that set it apart from traditional Protestant Christianity (Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 6). These historical observations highlight the importance of carefully examining the theological and historical claims that stand at the center of LDS belief.

Although Timothy Berman presents his article as a logical refutation of Bill Young’s critique, a careful examination of Berman’s argument reveals that it depends on circular reasoning, selective use of Scripture, and a failure to address the core historical and theological problems surrounding Joseph Smith and the foundational claims of the LDS Church. Rather than engaging directly with these underlying issues, Berman’s response focuses primarily on defending the authority of modern LDS leaders while presupposing the legitimacy of the restoration narrative itself.

Early in the article, Berman frames his intent as a balanced and rational analysis of the debate. He writes that the purpose of the post is to examine the arguments carefully and to expose what he believes are logical fallacies in Young’s critique. According to Berman, Young’s response to President Oaks’ devotional address “relies on category errors and circular reasoning” (Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026).

However, this framing immediately raises a significant problem. While Berman claims to identify circular reasoning in Young’s critique, the foundation of his own argument rests on the unexamined assumption that the prophetic authority of the LDS Church is legitimate. That assumption is not demonstrated through historical or theological evidence but is instead treated

as a starting premise. As a result, the argument becomes circular in the opposite direction: because LDS prophets are presumed to be divinely authorized, their teachings are treated as authoritative, and criticism of those teachings is therefore dismissed as logically flawed. This structure allows Berman to avoid addressing the central historical questions surrounding Joseph Smith, the founding claims of the LDS Church, and the legitimacy of modern prophetic authority.

Berman also attempts to portray Young’s critique as a misunderstanding of Latter-day Saint theology. In describing the devotion delivered by President Oaks, Berman summarizes the message by stating that Oaks teaches that “Jesus Christ is the answer to all doubts” and that spiritual knowledge is obtained through a “spiritual method” rather than through scientific investigation (Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026).

At first glance this language may appear compatible with Christian teaching, but the issue lies in how that principle is applied within the framework of LDS theology. In historic Christianity, spiritual knowledge is consistently tested against the authority of Scripture. The Bereans in Acts 17 were commended because they examined the Scriptures daily to determine whether the teachings they heard were true. By contrast, the LDS model of spiritual confirmation encourages individuals to seek a personal feeling or impression from the Holy Ghost as confirmation of LDS teachings, even when those teachings introduce doctrines that are absent from or contradictory to the biblical text.

This difference becomes especially significant when evaluating claims of modern prophetic authority. The New Testament repeatedly warns believers to test all teachings against the apostolic gospel that was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). If a later teaching introduces doctrines that fundamentally alter the nature of God, the identity of Jesus Christ, or the means of salvation, that teaching must be rejected regardless of the sincerity with which it is presented. Consequently, the debate between Young and Berman ultimately centers on whether the doctrines introduced by Joseph Smith and preserved in the LDS Church represent a continuation of biblical Christianity or a departure from it.

Footnotes

1. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 5.
2. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 6.
3. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026, <https://timothyberman.com/2026/02/24/a-logical-and-reasonable-refutation-of-bill-youngs-critique-of-president-dallin-h-oaks/>.

4. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.

I. Framing the Debate and the Question of Authority

Timothy R. Berman recently published a blog post titled “*A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks.*” In the article, Berman attempts to dismantle the arguments presented by Bill Young of the *Truth to Mormons* ministry while simultaneously defending the teachings of President Dallin H. Oaks and the broader theological framework of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At the outset, Berman presents his work as a fair and logical examination of Young’s critique, claiming that the evangelical response to Oaks’ devotionals is built upon faulty reasoning. According to Berman, Young’s critique ultimately “relies on category errors and circular reasoning” (Berman, 2026). However, while the article presents itself as a balanced analysis, closer examination reveals significant weaknesses in Berman’s argumentation. Rather than successfully dismantling Young’s critique, the article exposes several underlying tensions between Latter-day Saint theology and the historical teachings of biblical Christianity.

A central issue in Berman’s argument appears immediately in the way he frames the discussion. Throughout the article, Berman treats the prophetic authority of modern LDS leaders as an established fact rather than as a claim that must be historically and theologically defended. In other words, the legitimacy of LDS prophetic authority functions as a presupposition within the argument rather than as a conclusion supported by evidence. This creates a circular structure in Berman’s reasoning: because LDS prophets are assumed to possess legitimate authority, their teachings are therefore treated as authoritative, and criticism of those teachings can be dismissed as logically flawed. Such reasoning avoids addressing the fundamental historical question that lies beneath the entire debate—whether the prophetic claims of Joseph Smith and the restoration movement can withstand serious biblical and historical scrutiny. Scholars of Christian apologetics have long emphasized that religious claims must be evaluated according to historical evidence and doctrinal consistency rather than assumed authority (Habermas and Licona, 2004, 52).

Berman further summarizes President Oaks’ devotionals by asserting that the central message of the address is that “Jesus Christ is the answer to all doubts” and that spiritual truth is discovered through what he calls a “spiritual method” of knowledge rather than through the scientific method (Berman, 2026). On the surface, this statement appears compatible with traditional Christian teaching. Historic Christianity likewise affirms that knowledge of God ultimately comes through divine revelation rather than through purely empirical investigation. Scripture itself affirms that spiritual truths are discerned through the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14). Yet the issue in this debate is not whether spiritual knowledge exists, but rather how such knowledge is tested and verified.

In historic Christian theology, claims of divine revelation are always evaluated against the authority of Scripture. The Bereans were commended in the New Testament precisely because they examined the Scriptures daily to determine whether the teachings they heard were true (Acts 17:11). The apostolic message itself was subject to this standard of examination, demonstrating that even the teachings of recognized Christian leaders were to be tested against the written word of God. As theologian Kevin Vanhoozer observes, the authority of Scripture functions as the final norm for evaluating theological claims within the Christian tradition (Vanhoozer, 2015, 23).

The LDS model of spiritual confirmation, however, operates according to a different epistemological framework. Rather than testing doctrines against the authority of Scripture, individuals are encouraged to seek a personal spiritual confirmation through what LDS teachings describe as the witness of the Holy Ghost. This approach places subjective spiritual impressions in a position of interpretive authority. As a result, doctrines that are absent from the biblical text—or that contradict earlier biblical revelation—can nevertheless be accepted as true if they are believed to have been confirmed through spiritual experience. This methodological difference between biblical testing of revelation and LDS spiritual confirmation lies at the heart of the disagreement between Young and Berman. The question at stake is not merely one of interpretation but of authority: whether new doctrinal revelations introduced through Joseph Smith represent a legitimate continuation of apostolic Christianity or a departure from the gospel that Scripture declares was delivered “once for all to the saints” (ESV, Jude 3).

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026, <https://timothyberman.com>.
2. Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 52.
3. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pastors, Theologians, and Public Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 23.

II. The Question of Apostolic and Prophetic Authority

A central weakness in Berman’s response to Bill Young is his assumption that modern Latter-day Saint leaders possess legitimate prophetic and apostolic authority. Throughout the article, Berman treats the authority of LDS apostles and prophets as a settled matter rather than a historical claim that must be demonstrated. In defending the legitimacy of LDS leadership, Berman argues that critics impose a false requirement when they claim that apostles must be first-century eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ. According to Berman, this requirement is a “self-

invented” standard and lacks biblical support (Berman, 2026). This claim is critical to his defense because it attempts to justify the LDS practice of appointing modern apostles who claim prophetic authority similar to that of the original apostles in the New Testament.

However, Berman’s argument overlooks a key passage that defines the qualifications of apostles within the New Testament itself. In Acts 1:21–22, when the early church sought to replace Judas Iscariot, Peter established the criteria for apostleship: the individual must have accompanied the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus and must be a witness of His resurrection (ESV, Acts 1:21–22). This passage clearly demonstrates that apostolic authority in the New Testament was rooted in direct eyewitness testimony of the resurrected Christ. The apostles were not merely religious leaders or teachers but were uniquely commissioned witnesses whose authority derived from their direct encounter with Christ. As New Testament scholar Craig Keener explains, the apostolic office was closely tied to eyewitness testimony, which served as the foundation of the church’s proclamation of the gospel (Keener, 2012, 676).

The apostle Paul is sometimes presented as a counterexample to this requirement, yet even Paul’s apostleship was grounded in a direct appearance of the risen Christ. Paul repeatedly defended his apostolic authority by appealing to the fact that he had personally encountered Jesus following the resurrection (1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:8). In other words, even the exceptional case of Paul still satisfied the fundamental principle that apostolic authority derived from a direct commissioning by Christ Himself. Modern LDS apostles, however, make no such claim of having personally seen the resurrected Christ in a manner comparable to the apostolic witnesses of the New Testament. Instead, their authority rests on institutional succession within the LDS hierarchy rather than on direct apostolic commissioning.

Church history further reinforces the uniqueness of the apostolic office in the earliest Christian tradition. The earliest post-apostolic writers consistently treated the apostles as a unique and unrepeatable foundation of the church. Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the early second century, distinguished between the authority of the apostles and the authority of later church leaders such as bishops and elders (Ignatius, *Letter to the Trallians*, 3). Similarly, early Christian theologians understood the apostles to occupy a foundational role in the establishment of the church’s doctrine and authority. This perspective aligns with the teaching of Ephesians 2:20, which describes the church as being “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (ESV, Eph. 2:20). Foundations, by definition, are laid once and are not repeatedly rebuilt.

Because of this historical and biblical context, the claim that modern religious leaders can occupy the same office as the apostles of the New Testament raises serious theological questions. If the apostolic office was uniquely tied to eyewitness testimony of the resurrected Christ and to the foundational establishment of the church, then the LDS claim of a continuing apostolic office represents a significant departure from historic Christian teaching. Berman’s argument attempts to dismiss this concern by redefining the qualifications of apostleship, yet such a redefinition

conflicts both with the explicit criteria described in the New Testament and with the understanding of the earliest Christian writers. Consequently, the issue of apostolic authority remains a critical challenge for the LDS claim of modern prophetic leadership.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.
2. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 676.
3. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallians*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 201.

III. Revelation and the Claim of Modern Prophets

Another major component of Berman’s argument concerns the nature of prophetic revelation. In responding to Bill Young’s critique of President Oaks, Berman argues that critics misunderstand how revelation functions within the Latter-day Saint tradition. Specifically, Berman addresses Young’s criticism that Oaks described receiving “impressions” rather than delivering a traditional prophetic declaration. Berman dismisses this concern, arguing that revelation in Scripture often occurs through subtle means such as impressions, whisperings, or spiritual promptings rather than through dramatic prophetic proclamations. As Berman writes, “Scripture shows that revelation comes in many forms: dreams, visions, impressions, whisperings, and spiritual promptings” (Berman, 2026).

At one level, Berman’s observation is correct. The Bible does indeed record a variety of ways in which God communicates with His people. Prophetic revelation sometimes occurred through dreams, visions, angelic messengers, or the inward prompting of the Spirit (Num. 12:6; Acts 10:9–16). However, the critical issue in this debate is not the *method* by which revelation is received but the *authority and content* of the revelation being claimed. In Scripture, prophetic revelation was never treated as merely subjective spiritual impressions that individuals were free to interpret according to personal conviction. Rather, the authority of a prophet was subject to clear and objective tests established by God Himself.

One of the most explicit tests for prophetic authority appears in Deuteronomy 18. In this passage, Moses instructs Israel on how to evaluate those who claim to speak on behalf of God. The test is straightforward: if a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the prediction does not come to pass, the prophet has spoken presumptuously and must not be feared (ESV, Deut. 18:21–22). This standard demonstrates that biblical prophecy was not based on vague

impressions or internal spiritual experiences. Instead, prophetic authority required verifiable accuracy and complete fidelity to God's prior revelation. As theologian Wayne Grudem explains, the biblical understanding of prophecy involved speaking words that were believed to originate directly from God and therefore carried divine authority (Grudem, 2000, 49).

The New Testament reinforces this same principle. The apostle Paul warned the early church that even dramatic spiritual experiences must be evaluated against the apostolic gospel that had already been proclaimed. In Galatians 1:8, Paul writes, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed" (ESV, Gal. 1:8). This warning establishes a crucial theological principle: later revelations cannot overturn or fundamentally alter the message that had already been delivered by the apostles. Any new teaching that contradicts the apostolic gospel must be rejected regardless of the spiritual experiences that accompany it.

This principle becomes particularly relevant when evaluating the prophetic claims associated with Joseph Smith and the founding of the LDS Church. Smith did not merely claim to receive personal spiritual impressions. Rather, he claimed to receive new doctrinal revelations that introduced teachings fundamentally different from historic Christian theology. Among these were doctrines such as the plurality of gods, the potential exaltation of human beings into godhood, and the existence of additional scriptures such as the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. These teachings represent substantial theological developments that go far beyond the type of personal spiritual guidance described in many biblical passages.

Because of this, the question facing the reader is not whether spiritual impressions occur but whether the revelations attributed to Joseph Smith are consistent with the gospel message already established in the New Testament. Historic Christianity has consistently held that divine revelation reached its climax in the person of Jesus Christ and in the apostolic testimony recorded in Scripture. The author of Hebrews expresses this clearly when he writes that "in these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son" (ESV, Heb. 1:2). As theologian D. A. Carson notes, this passage emphasizes the finality of God's revelation in Christ and the sufficiency of the apostolic witness that proclaims Him (Carson, 2010, 89).

For this reason, Berman's defense of modern prophetic revelation does not resolve the central concern raised by Young's critique. While Berman correctly notes that revelation can occur through various means, the legitimacy of prophetic authority cannot be established simply by appealing to the subjective experience of receiving impressions. The decisive question is whether the teachings produced by those revelations remain consistent with the gospel that was proclaimed by Christ and His apostles. If they do not, then the biblical standard requires that such revelations be rejected regardless of the sincerity of the individuals who claim to receive them.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.
2. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 49.
3. D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God’s Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 89.

IV. The Historical Problem of Joseph Smith and the First Vision

Another major issue underlying Berman’s defense of Latter-day Saint prophetic authority concerns the historical claims surrounding Joseph Smith’s First Vision. In addressing Bill Young’s critique, Berman dismisses the concern that Smith’s visionary experience may have involved deception and argues that Young misinterprets the narrative by suggesting that the presence of a dark spiritual power undermines the legitimacy of the vision. Berman writes that critics misunderstand the account and insists that the appearance of opposition does not invalidate divine revelation, noting that even Christ encountered Satan during His earthly ministry (Berman, 2026). By framing the discussion this way, Berman attempts to neutralize Young’s critique by comparing Smith’s experience to the temptations of Christ recorded in the Gospels.

However, this comparison does not address the more significant historical questions surrounding the First Vision itself. The primary issue raised by many scholars is not merely the presence of opposition in Smith’s account but the fact that multiple versions of the First Vision narrative exist, and these versions differ in important theological and historical details. Historians have documented at least four major accounts of the First Vision produced by Joseph Smith between 1832 and 1842. These accounts vary in their descriptions of the beings who appeared, the purpose of the vision, and even the central message delivered during the experience. As LDS historian Richard Bushman acknowledges, the earliest surviving account from 1832 mentions only a single divine figure, while later accounts describe two distinct personages identified as God the Father and Jesus Christ (Bushman, 2005, 39).

The existence of multiple versions of the First Vision does not automatically invalidate the possibility that Smith experienced some form of religious encounter. Historical figures often recount significant events differently over time. Nevertheless, the variations in Smith’s accounts raise important questions about the development of the narrative and the theological claims attached to it. In the earliest account, Smith focuses primarily on the forgiveness of his sins, while later accounts increasingly emphasize the idea that all existing Christian denominations

were corrupt and that a complete restoration of the church was necessary. This shift in emphasis corresponds closely with the development of Joseph Smith's later theological claims regarding the restoration of priesthood authority and the founding of a new religious movement.

Church historians outside the LDS tradition have noted that these differences suggest the possibility that the First Vision narrative developed gradually as Smith's theological ideas evolved. Historian Grant Palmer argues that the variations in the accounts reflect a retrospective construction of the narrative that became more detailed and theologically complex over time (Palmer, 2002, 235). Whether one ultimately agrees with Palmer's conclusions or not, the existence of multiple accounts introduces legitimate historical questions that cannot simply be dismissed by comparing Smith's experience to biblical encounters with Satan.

Beyond the historical inconsistencies, the theological implications of the First Vision also present a challenge when compared with the biblical doctrine of God. According to the official LDS account, Joseph Smith saw both God the Father and Jesus Christ as two distinct embodied beings standing before him. This portrayal of God differs significantly from the historic Christian understanding of divine nature. Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the transcendence and invisibility of God the Father. John's Gospel states that "no one has ever seen God" (ESV, John 1:18), while the apostle Paul writes that God "dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (ESV, 1 Tim. 6:16). These passages have historically been interpreted within Christian theology as affirming that God's essence is not physically visible in the way that Smith later described.

For this reason, the First Vision remains one of the most significant points of tension between LDS theology and historic Christian doctrine. Berman's defense attempts to address a narrow criticism raised by Young, but it does not engage with the broader historical and theological questions surrounding the development of the First Vision narrative. Because the LDS claim of prophetic restoration ultimately rests upon Joseph Smith's visionary authority, these historical issues carry substantial weight. If the foundational vision itself is historically uncertain or theologically inconsistent with biblical teaching, then the broader claims of restored priesthood authority and modern prophecy become significantly more difficult to sustain.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, "A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young's Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks," February 24, 2026.
2. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 39.
3. Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 235.

V. Salvation, Grace, and the Question of a Present Savior

Another important component of Berman's response concerns the doctrine of salvation. In summarizing Bill Young's critique, Berman argues that Young incorrectly claims Latter-day Saints lack a present-tense Savior. According to Berman, this criticism rests on a misunderstanding of LDS theology. Berman contends that Latter-day Saints affirm both present and future aspects of salvation and therefore do not deny the saving role of Jesus Christ in the life of believers (Berman, 2026). By framing the issue this way, Berman attempts to demonstrate that Young has constructed a false dilemma between present salvation and future judgment.

While it is true that Latter-day Saint teaching includes language about salvation through Jesus Christ, the structure of LDS soteriology differs significantly from the doctrine of salvation presented in the New Testament. Within official LDS teaching, salvation is often described in multiple categories, including general resurrection, conditional salvation, and exaltation. Resurrection is understood as a universal gift granted to all humanity through the atonement of Christ, while exaltation—the highest form of salvation—is contingent upon obedience to commandments, participation in temple ordinances, and enduring faithfulness within the LDS covenant system. As LDS apostle Bruce R. McConkie explains, exaltation represents the ultimate goal of salvation and requires complete adherence to the ordinances and laws of the restored gospel (McConkie, 1979, 116).

The New Testament, however, consistently presents salvation in terms that emphasize the present reality of justification through faith. The apostle Paul writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (ESV, Eph. 2:8–9). Similarly, Paul explains in Romans that God "justifies the ungodly" through faith apart from works of the law (ESV, Rom. 4:5). These passages emphasize that salvation is not achieved through a progressive system of ordinances or personal merit but is received as a gift through faith in the completed work of Christ.

This understanding of justification was central to historic Christian theology. During the Reformation, theologians such as Martin Luther and John Calvin argued that justification by faith alone was the heart of the biblical gospel. Luther described justification as the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls, emphasizing that believers are declared righteous before God solely through the imputed righteousness of Christ (Luther, 1960, 112). In this framework, salvation is not merely a future possibility but a present reality grounded in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Because of this distinction, Young's critique focuses not on whether Latter-day Saints use Christian terminology but on how those terms function within LDS doctrine. If exaltation ultimately depends on personal obedience, temple participation, and covenant faithfulness, then salvation becomes a process that is only fully realized after judgment. In contrast, the New

Testament repeatedly affirms that believers can possess assurance of salvation in the present. The apostle John writes, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” (ESV, 1 John 5:13). This passage reflects the confidence that comes from trusting in Christ’s completed work rather than relying on a future evaluation of one’s covenant obedience.

For this reason, the disagreement between Young and Berman ultimately reflects two fundamentally different models of salvation. The LDS model combines divine grace with covenantal obedience and temple ordinances in a structured progression toward exaltation. Historic Christian theology, by contrast, teaches that justification before God is secured entirely through faith in Christ and is therefore possessed by believers in the present. Because of this difference, Berman’s attempt to dismiss Young’s critique does not resolve the theological tension between these two systems. Instead, the discussion highlights the deeper doctrinal divide concerning the nature of grace, the role of works, and the assurance of salvation in the life of the believer.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 116.
3. Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1960), 112.

VI. Discernment, Authority, and the Question of Information Control

Another significant point of disagreement between Bill Young and Timothy Berman concerns President Oaks’ instruction that Latter-day Saints should avoid sources that undermine faith. In defending Oaks’ counsel, Berman argues that critics mischaracterize this advice as a form of information control. Instead, he claims that such guidance is consistent with biblical teaching about avoiding false teachers and deceptive influences. According to Berman, Young’s critique wrongly frames this instruction as cult-like behavior when it is actually an example of responsible spiritual leadership (Berman, 2026). By presenting the issue in this way, Berman attempts to portray Young’s argument as both exaggerated and logically flawed.

At first glance, Berman’s defense appears plausible. The New Testament certainly contains numerous warnings about false teachers and deceptive doctrines. The apostle Paul urged believers to “watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them” (ESV, Rom. 16:17). Similarly, Paul warned the

Colossian church not to be taken captive by “philosophy and empty deceit” rooted in human tradition rather than in Christ (ESV, Col. 2:8). These passages clearly demonstrate that spiritual discernment is an important responsibility for Christian believers.

However, the biblical concept of discernment differs in a crucial way from the approach described in President Oaks’ address. In the New Testament, warnings about false teaching are consistently accompanied by an invitation to examine claims carefully in light of Scripture. The most famous example of this principle appears in Acts 17, where the Bereans are commended for evaluating the apostle Paul’s teaching by searching the Scriptures daily to determine whether his message was true (ESV, Acts 17:11). Significantly, the Bereans did not simply accept Paul’s authority as an apostle without question. Instead, they tested his message against the written word of God.

This pattern illustrates an essential feature of biblical discernment: truth claims are evaluated through open examination rather than restricted inquiry. Christian theologians have long emphasized that Scripture itself provides the standard by which all religious teaching must be judged. As historian Justo L. González notes, the early Christian community developed its understanding of doctrine through public debate and careful engagement with Scripture rather than through the suppression of competing viewpoints (González, 2010, 58).

By contrast, the warning issued in President Oaks’ devotional discourages engagement with sources that present critical perspectives on LDS history or doctrine. According to Berman’s summary, Oaks specifically warns members to avoid “non-faithful sources” and those who specialize in speculation or misinformation (Berman, 2026). While the desire to protect believers from misleading information is understandable, the effect of such guidance can limit the ability of individuals to examine competing historical and theological claims. When members are discouraged from consulting outside sources, the range of information available for evaluating doctrinal questions becomes significantly restricted.

This distinction between discernment and information restriction is important when evaluating religious truth claims. If a belief system is historically and theologically sound, then it should be able to withstand careful scrutiny from multiple perspectives. Open investigation does not threaten truth; rather, it often strengthens confidence in it. As philosopher William Lane Craig argues, Christianity historically welcomed rigorous examination of its claims because the faith is rooted in publicly accessible historical events such as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Craig, 2008, 23).

For this reason, the debate between Young and Berman ultimately reflects differing views of how religious claims should be evaluated. Berman defends Oaks’ counsel as a reasonable form of spiritual discernment, while Young interprets it as an attempt to discourage investigation into problematic aspects of LDS history and doctrine. The biblical model represented by the Bereans suggests that the appropriate response to theological disagreement is neither blind acceptance nor restricted inquiry but careful examination of evidence in light of Scripture. When religious

leaders encourage believers to test claims openly rather than avoid difficult questions, the result is a faith that rests on conviction rather than institutional authority.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.
2. Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 58.
3. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 23.

VII. The Use and Misuse of Logical Fallacies in Berman’s Critique

Throughout his article, Timothy Berman repeatedly attempts to undermine Bill Young’s critique by accusing him of committing various logical fallacies. Among the fallacies Berman identifies are ad hominem arguments, straw man misrepresentations, false dilemmas, and what he describes as “chronological snobbery.” According to Berman, Young’s criticisms of President Oaks and LDS doctrine rely on rhetorical attacks rather than legitimate theological analysis (Berman, 2026). By framing the discussion in terms of logical fallacies, Berman seeks to portray Young’s critique as intellectually careless and therefore unworthy of serious consideration.

While identifying logical fallacies can be a valuable tool in critical analysis, the effectiveness of such accusations depends on whether the fallacy has actually occurred. In many cases, Berman’s use of these labels appears to function less as a demonstration of flawed reasoning and more as a rhetorical strategy designed to dismiss opposing arguments. One example involves Berman’s claim that Young engages in an ad hominem attack by mentioning President Oaks’ age during his commentary on the devotional address. Berman suggests that referencing Oaks’ age implies a criticism of his intellectual capacity and therefore constitutes a personal attack rather than a theological critique (Berman, 2026).

However, in the context of Young’s critique, the mention of Oaks’ age appears to function primarily as an observation about the structure and presentation of the devotional rather than as an argument against the validity of LDS doctrine. Even if the comment were considered unnecessary or rhetorically sharp, it does not address the central issues being debated. The substance of Young’s critique concerns doctrinal claims about revelation, prophetic authority, and salvation. These arguments stand independently of any comment about the personal characteristics of President Oaks. As philosopher Douglas Groothuis explains, an ad hominem

fallacy occurs only when a personal attack is used as the primary basis for rejecting an argument rather than addressing the argument itself (Groothuis, 2011, 106).

Berman also accuses Young of constructing straw man arguments when discussing LDS doctrine. A straw man fallacy occurs when an opponent's position is misrepresented in a simplified or distorted form in order to make it easier to refute. Yet in several cases, Young's critique appears to focus on statements drawn directly from LDS leaders or official teachings. When a critic quotes authoritative LDS sources and analyzes their theological implications, the resulting critique cannot automatically be dismissed as a straw man simply because the conclusions are unfavorable. Careful evaluation of doctrinal claims is a necessary part of any meaningful theological dialogue.

Another accusation Berman raises is that Young engages in "chronological snobbery," a term popularized by C. S. Lewis to describe the tendency to dismiss older ideas simply because they originate in the past. Berman uses this label to argue that critics unfairly judge nineteenth-century religious developments by modern standards (Berman, 2026). While it is true that historical context must be considered when evaluating past events, the concept of chronological snobbery does not apply in the way Berman suggests. The central issues raised in the debate—such as prophetic authority, doctrinal consistency, and historical credibility—are not dependent on modern cultural standards but on enduring theological principles.

In fact, the evaluation of prophetic claims has always involved careful historical and doctrinal scrutiny. The biblical test for prophets described in Deuteronomy 18 was itself a historical test: a prophet's predictions and teachings could be evaluated against observable outcomes and previously revealed truth (ESV, Deut. 18:21–22). This principle demonstrates that examining the historical record of religious claims is not an example of chronological bias but an essential part of biblical discernment.

For these reasons, Berman's repeated accusations of logical fallacies do not successfully invalidate Young's critique. Instead, they often function as rhetorical distractions from the substantive theological and historical questions under discussion. Logical analysis is valuable when applied carefully and consistently, but labeling an argument with the name of a fallacy does not, by itself, demonstrate that the argument is false. As philosopher Alvin Plantinga observes, philosophical and theological debates are best advanced through careful engagement with evidence and reasoning rather than through the mere identification of rhetorical errors (Plantinga, 2000, 42). Consequently, a meaningful evaluation of the debate between Young and Berman must ultimately return to the historical and doctrinal claims that form the foundation of the LDS restoration narrative.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.
2. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 106.
3. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 42.

VIII. The Credibility of Joseph Smith and the Biblical Test of a Prophet

At the foundation of the debate between Timothy Berman and Bill Young lies a question that Berman’s article never fully confronts: the credibility of Joseph Smith as a prophet. Throughout his response, Berman focuses on defending particular teachings of President Dallin H. Oaks and responding to Young’s criticisms of LDS doctrine. Yet the authority of those teachings ultimately rests on the assumption that Joseph Smith was genuinely called by God to restore the true church. Without the prophetic legitimacy of Smith himself, the claims of modern LDS apostles and prophets lose their theological foundation. Consequently, any serious defense of the Latter-day Saint system must address whether Smith’s prophetic claims satisfy the biblical criteria for a true prophet.

The Bible provides clear standards for evaluating prophetic authority. One of the most explicit tests appears in Deuteronomy 18, where Moses instructs Israel on how to determine whether a prophet has truly spoken on behalf of God. According to this passage, if a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the predicted event does not occur, the prophet has spoken presumptuously and should not be regarded as a messenger of God (ESV, Deut. 18:21–22). This standard establishes a principle of prophetic accountability: those who claim divine revelation must demonstrate that their words correspond perfectly with reality. Unlike general spiritual impressions or subjective experiences, prophetic declarations in Scripture were expected to be precise and verifiable.

When this standard is applied to Joseph Smith’s prophetic ministry, several historical difficulties emerge. Smith produced numerous revelations throughout his life, many of which were recorded in the LDS text known as the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Some of these revelations included specific predictions about future events. One example often discussed by historians concerns a revelation delivered in 1832 predicting that a rebellion beginning in South Carolina would lead to a worldwide conflict involving many nations (Doctrine and Covenants 87:1–3). While some Latter-day Saint interpreters argue that this prophecy anticipated the American Civil War, critics note that the broader prediction of a global war involving all nations did not occur in the manner described. The debate surrounding such prophecies illustrates the importance of examining prophetic claims within their historical context.

Beyond individual predictions, scholars have also raised questions about the broader development of Smith's prophetic career. Historian Richard Bushman observes that Joseph Smith's early ministry included a variety of activities common within the religious culture of nineteenth-century America, including treasure seeking and the use of seer stones in attempts to locate hidden objects (Bushman, 2005, 50). These practices do not necessarily disprove Smith's later religious claims, but they do provide important historical context for understanding how Smith's prophetic role developed. Historians continue to debate how these early activities influenced the later narratives surrounding the translation of the Book of Mormon and the establishment of the LDS Church.

From the perspective of historic Christian theology, the central question is whether Smith's teachings align with the gospel message preserved in the New Testament. The apostle Paul warned the Galatian church that even if a messenger claiming supernatural authority were to preach a different gospel, that message must be rejected (ESV, Gal. 1:8). This warning establishes a principle that later revelations cannot contradict the apostolic message about the nature of God and the work of Christ. If a new prophet introduces doctrines fundamentally different from those taught by the apostles, the new teaching must be evaluated critically in light of the biblical standard.

Many of the distinctive doctrines introduced by Joseph Smith represent significant departures from historic Christian theology. These include teachings about the plurality of gods, the possibility that human beings may become gods in the afterlife, and the idea that God the Father possesses a physical body. Such doctrines differ markedly from the classical Christian understanding of God's nature as eternal, unique, and uncreated. As theologian Millard Erickson explains, historic Christian doctrine affirms the absolute uniqueness of God and rejects the notion that divine status can be attained by human beings (Erickson, 2013, 267).

Because the LDS claim of restored priesthood authority ultimately depends upon Joseph Smith's prophetic credibility, these historical and theological issues carry substantial significance. Berman's article attempts to defend LDS leadership by critiquing Bill Young's arguments, yet it does not adequately address the deeper question of whether Smith's prophetic claims satisfy the biblical standards for divine revelation. Until that foundational question is addressed, debates about the authority of modern LDS leaders remain secondary to the larger issue of whether the restoration itself rests on a credible prophetic foundation.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, "A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young's Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks," February 24, 2026.
2. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 50.

3. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 267.

IX. The Book of Abraham and the Problem of Translation

One of the most significant historical challenges to Joseph Smith's prophetic credibility involves the origin and translation of the *Book of Abraham*. While Timothy Berman's article focuses primarily on defending President Dallin H. Oaks and responding to Bill Young's critique, it does not engage with several well-documented historical issues surrounding Joseph Smith's translation claims. Among these, the controversy surrounding the *Book of Abraham* stands out as one of the most thoroughly examined topics in Mormon studies. Because Joseph Smith claimed to translate this text from ancient Egyptian papyri through divine inspiration, the accuracy of that translation carries direct implications for his prophetic authority.

According to the traditional LDS account, Joseph Smith acquired several Egyptian papyrus fragments in 1835 and announced that they contained writings composed by the biblical patriarch Abraham. Smith subsequently produced what became known as the *Book of Abraham*, which is now included in the LDS canon as part of the *Pearl of Great Price*. For many years, the original papyri used by Smith were believed to have been destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871. However, in 1967 several fragments of the papyri were rediscovered in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and later transferred to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These fragments were then examined by professional Egyptologists, who were able to translate the Egyptian text using well-established linguistic methods.

The results of this examination generated considerable debate among both LDS and non-LDS scholars. Egyptologists concluded that the surviving papyri were not writings of the patriarch Abraham but rather portions of Egyptian funerary texts commonly known as the *Book of Breathings*, a document associated with burial practices in ancient Egypt (Givens, 2015, 123). These texts date to roughly the first century BCE—many centuries after the time traditionally associated with Abraham. This chronological gap raises obvious questions about the historical basis of Smith's translation claim. As historian Terryl Givens observes, the rediscovery of the papyri forced scholars to reconsider the relationship between Smith's translation and the original Egyptian material (Givens, 2015, 124).

The issue becomes even more complex when the Egyptian characters preserved on the papyri are compared with the English text produced by Joseph Smith. Modern Egyptological analysis indicates that the characters on the fragments correspond to standard funerary formulae rather than to a narrative describing Abraham's life. As a result, the English text of the *Book of Abraham* does not appear to represent a conventional translation of the surviving Egyptian material. Egyptologist Robert Ritner concluded that the papyri fragments are "ordinary Egyptian funerary documents" with no linguistic connection to the narrative produced by Smith (Ritner,

2013, 77). Although LDS scholars have proposed alternative explanations—such as the possibility that additional missing papyri once contained Abraham’s writings—the surviving evidence has led many historians to conclude that the relationship between the papyri and Smith’s translation remains highly problematic.

The debate surrounding the *Book of Abraham* illustrates why historical evidence plays a crucial role in evaluating prophetic claims. If Joseph Smith possessed the divine ability to translate ancient languages through revelation, then the resulting text would reasonably be expected to correspond in some meaningful way with the original document. The apparent disconnect between the Egyptian papyri and Smith’s translation therefore raises legitimate questions about the nature of the translation process itself. These questions do not automatically resolve the broader theological debate between Latter-day Saints and evangelical critics, but they do highlight the importance of historical scrutiny when evaluating claims of supernatural revelation.

For this reason, the controversy surrounding the *Book of Abraham* represents more than a narrow historical dispute. It directly affects the credibility of Joseph Smith’s prophetic ministry, which in turn forms the foundation of the LDS restoration narrative. Because Berman’s defense of modern LDS leadership ultimately depends upon the authority of Joseph Smith, the historical questions raised by the *Book of Abraham* cannot be easily set aside. Any comprehensive defense of LDS prophetic authority must grapple seriously with the evidence surrounding Smith’s translation claims and the scholarly debate that continues to surround them.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.
2. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 123–124.
3. Robert K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013), 77.

X. Biblical Monotheism and the Nature of God

Beyond the historical questions surrounding Joseph Smith’s prophetic claims lies a deeper theological divide between Latter-day Saint doctrine and historic Christian teaching concerning the nature of God. While Timothy Berman’s article focuses primarily on defending President Dallin H. Oaks and responding to Bill Young’s critique, the broader debate ultimately

centers on whether the theological framework introduced by Joseph Smith is consistent with the monotheistic teaching of the Bible. Because the doctrine of God forms the foundation of all Christian theology, differences in this area carry profound implications for evaluating competing religious claims.

Historic Christianity has consistently affirmed the doctrine of monotheism—the belief that there is one and only one true God who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This understanding is rooted in the repeated biblical affirmation that God is unique and incomparable. The prophet Isaiah records the Lord declaring, “Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me” (ESV, Isa. 43:10). Similarly, Isaiah later proclaims, “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (ESV, Isa. 45:5). These passages emphasize not merely the supremacy of God among many divine beings but the absolute uniqueness of God’s nature and existence.

By contrast, Latter-day Saint theology presents a significantly different understanding of the divine nature. Joseph Smith’s later teachings introduced the concept that God the Father was once a man who progressed to divine status and that human beings may likewise become gods through exaltation. This idea was famously articulated in Smith’s 1844 sermon commonly known as the King Follett discourse, where he taught that God himself “was once as we are now, and is an exalted man” (Smith, 1844). The implication of this teaching is that the divine nature is not eternally unique but part of a broader continuum in which humans may eventually participate as fully divine beings.

LDS scholars have attempted to interpret these teachings in ways that preserve a meaningful distinction between God and humanity while still affirming the doctrine of exaltation. Terryl Givens notes that Mormon theology envisions a universe populated by divine beings while still maintaining worship directed toward the Father as the supreme object of devotion (Givens, 2015, 302). Nevertheless, the concept of a plurality of gods remains a defining feature of LDS thought and represents a departure from the classical Christian doctrine of God.

From the perspective of historic Christian theology, this doctrinal difference is not merely a minor variation but a fundamental shift in the understanding of divine nature. Christian theologians have long emphasized that God is not simply a more advanced member of the human species but the eternal creator who exists independently of all created things. As Millard Erickson explains, classical Christian theology affirms that God is the uncreated, self-existent being upon whom all other reality depends (Erickson, 2013, 267). In this framework, the possibility of humans becoming gods in the same sense as the Father is incompatible with the biblical distinction between Creator and creation.

The New Testament reinforces this distinction by consistently presenting God as the sole object of worship and the unique source of salvation. The apostle Paul writes that “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (ESV, 1 Tim. 2:5). Likewise, Jesus Himself affirms the central confession of Jewish monotheism when He declares,

“The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (ESV, Mark 12:29). These passages reflect a theological continuity between the Old and New Testaments that affirms the singular nature of God’s identity.

For this reason, the debate between Young and Berman ultimately extends beyond the interpretation of a single devotional address or the rhetorical structure of a YouTube critique. It touches the central question of whether the theological system introduced by Joseph Smith aligns with the monotheistic worldview presented in Scripture. If the biblical authors consistently affirm that God is eternally unique and incomparable, then doctrines that describe God as a once-mortal being or propose the existence of multiple gods introduce a fundamentally different theological framework. Consequently, the issue at stake in the debate is not merely a disagreement about interpretation but a deeper question concerning the continuity between LDS theology and the historic Christian doctrine of God.

Footnotes

1. Timothy R. Berman, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” February 24, 2026.
2. Joseph Smith, “The King Follett Discourse,” April 7, 1844.
3. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 302.
4. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 267.

XI. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to evaluate Timothy R. Berman’s article, “A Logical and Reasonable Refutation of Bill Young’s Critique of President Dallin H. Oaks,” and to examine whether Berman successfully addresses the concerns raised regarding Latter-day Saint doctrine and prophetic authority. While Berman presents his article as a careful logical response, the analysis in this paper demonstrates that his argument leaves several critical historical and theological issues unresolved. In particular, the article fails to adequately address the central questions surrounding Joseph Smith’s prophetic credibility, the historical challenges associated with the *Book of Abraham*, and the significant doctrinal differences between LDS theology and the monotheistic framework of the Bible.

Throughout the discussion, it has become clear that the debate between Berman and Young ultimately centers on the authority of Scripture and the criteria by which prophetic claims are evaluated. The Bible repeatedly instructs believers to test all teachings carefully. The Bereans

were commended because they examined the Scriptures daily to determine whether the teachings they heard were true (ESV, Acts 17:11). Likewise, the apostle Paul warned that even if a messenger claiming divine authority were to proclaim a different gospel, that message must be rejected (ESV, Gal. 1:8). These passages establish a consistent biblical principle: claims of revelation must always be evaluated in light of the written Word of God.

When the doctrines introduced by Joseph Smith are examined according to this biblical standard, substantial tensions emerge. LDS teachings concerning exaltation, the plurality of gods, and the nature of divine progression differ markedly from the historic Christian understanding of God as the eternal and unique Creator. The Bible consistently affirms that there is one true God who has revealed Himself through Scripture and through the person of Jesus Christ. The introduction of additional scriptures, new prophetic authority, and doctrines that alter the nature of God raises serious theological questions about whether the LDS system represents a restoration of biblical Christianity or a departure from it.

It is important to acknowledge that many members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints demonstrate sincere devotion and a genuine desire to live morally upright lives. In many cases their commitment to family, discipline, and personal virtue is admirable. Yet sincerity alone cannot determine the truth of a theological claim. Religious history contains numerous examples of deeply committed individuals whose beliefs were nevertheless based on mistaken premises. For this reason, the question of doctrinal truth must ultimately be evaluated by examining historical evidence and comparing theological claims with the teachings of Scripture.

This study has approached the subject of Mormonism not from a position of hostility but from a commitment to careful investigation. The author's own engagement with the subject has involved several years of studying both the Bible and the historical development of LDS theology. Such study reinforces the importance of following the biblical instruction not to rely on private interpretation or untested revelation but to evaluate all teaching through the consistent witness of Scripture (ESV, 2 Pet. 1:20–21). When the biblical text is examined in its historical and literary context, it provides a coherent framework for understanding the nature of God, the work of Christ, and the means of salvation.

Ultimately, the central message of the New Testament is that salvation is grounded in the finished work of Jesus Christ rather than in additional revelations or restored priesthood authority. The gospel proclaimed by the apostles emphasizes that sinners are reconciled to God through grace by faith in Christ alone (ESV, Eph. 2:8–9). Because of this, the call of the Christian faith is not to seek new prophetic systems but to remain anchored in the gospel that was “once for all delivered to the saints” (ESV, Jude 3).

For these reasons, the critique offered by William Young raises questions that Berman's response does not fully resolve. The discussion ultimately returns to the same challenge presented throughout the New Testament: believers are called to test every teaching and to hold

fast to what is true (ESV, 1 Thess. 5:21). When religious claims are evaluated in this way—through careful historical inquiry and faithful attention to Scripture—the resulting conclusions must be guided not by tradition or institutional authority but by the enduring testimony of the Word of God.

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