

Several years back, I was discussing some of these matters with one of my daughters, and she posed this question to me: Let's just say you're right, and that the Church's claims aren't true. What is the harm in staying in it, and being involved with it? We're happy, we're living good lives. What is the harm?

I think that is an excellent question, but at that time, I wasn't prepared or able to give her an adequate reply. But I've thought a lot about it since then, and want to conclude by providing a better answer to that question.

1. Because members are actively discouraged from critical examination of the Church's claims, effectively creating an independent 'island' of reality, or a mental 'blind spot,' where the regular rules of evidence don't apply, I think this results in harm to a person's thought processes and critical thinking skills.

In turn, I think this can result in a person's being more vulnerable, or gullible, to other claims being made without evidence, which appeal to their emotions or other non-rational mindsets. It can also make a person more likely to distrust scientifically established facts and conclusions, since they are taught not to 'trust in the arm of flesh,' and that the only absolutely reliable indication of truth is their testimonies, their individual, subjective experiences.

This also tends to create a 'magical' world view, where they live in a 'cocoon,' seeing the world as they want it to be, rather than as it really is. It can lead to poor decision making, placing too much importance on subjective emotional states and experiences.

Taken to the extreme, the results can be tragic. The case of the [Lafferty Brothers](#) is especially poignant here. Dan and Ron Lafferty murdered their sister-in-law Brenda Lafferty, and her 15 month old baby Erica, because they trusted the 'revelations' they received, and were convinced that this is what God wanted them to do. The scriptural precedent is right there in the Book of Mormon, where Nephi kills Laban, in cold blood, because he was convinced that this action was commanded by God.

Lastly, the Church effectively treats the members as perpetual children, and makes them dependent on the Church for approval on virtually all aspects of their lives (even down to how many earrings it is 'acceptable' for a woman to wear). They are taught to trust in the Church, and its leaders, even more than trusting their own understanding and insights. N. Eldon Tanner, of the First Presidency confirmed this when he said:

"When the Prophet speaks... the debate is over."

[Ensign, August 1979](#)

2. Very real problems are often created in families where one or more individuals don't fit the 'mold' of the traditional Church member. This is especially the case with Gay and Lesbian children (or adults), whose very identities and deepest desires are seen as unacceptable before God, if not overtly evil. The tragedy of so many teen suicides speaks eloquently to this very real danger.

And even if individuals or families adopt a more tolerant and open personal attitude, the Church they support with their money, activity, and devotion, has been actively working to deny these individuals the right to the same relationships that the rest of society enjoys. The Church's efforts in support of Proposition 8 in California is a powerful case in point. This has to at least create some internal conflict and stress, or 'cognitive dissonance,' which is unhealthy for anyone's well-being.

3. There is a very real, very substantial financial cost to full Church participation. This is especially true for members on the lower side of the income scale, as discussed above. Their financial future and stability are very much jeopardized as a result of this enormous drain on their resources.

4. I am a male, and do not feel comfortable or qualified to effectively address this next area, but be-

cause it is so important, and affects so many females, of all ages, I felt I at least need to refer to it. In many ways, women occupy a 'second class' status in the Church, in that any of their actions and decisions are always subject to being approved, or over-ruled by the men who preside in positions of authority over them. When women in the Church are asked about this, they'll very often state that they feel equal to men, and don't see any problem in this regard. But the fact of the matter is that they aren't equal. Equality isn't a matter of 'feeling' equal; it's a matter of being equal.

Many women in the Church may not feel discrimination or inequality, and accept and love their Church-defined primary role as wives and mothers. But even here, circumstances and even biology may prevent these women from fulfilling even these roles, resulting in sadness and discouragement. And some women simply don't feel the same 'call' to be wives and mothers, and find themselves marginalized, and more affected by the limitations created by the Church's narrowly defined gender roles for women.

But it is much better to have this addressed by the women themselves, and for this, please see on-line forums such as [Feminist Mormon Housewives](#), [Young Mormon Feminists](#), [Ask Mormon Girl](#), [The Exponent](#), and many others.

5. The Church's extreme, over-emphasis on modesty and chastity, ranking infractions here next to murder in terms of seriousness, can make it difficult for women, and men, to incorporate sexuality into their lives and relationships in a healthy manner as they mature. And the Church's prohibition on masturbation, seeing it as a major offense against God, contributes to this distortion of sexual function and identity, causing unnecessary guilt and suffering for many people. Consider these quotes from recent Church Leaders:

"Better dead clean, than alive unclean. Many is the faithful Latter-day Saint parent who has sent a son or daughter on a mission or otherwise out into the world with the direction, 'I would rather have you come back home in a pine box with your virtue than return alive without it' "

Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, Second Edition, Page 124

"Also far-reaching is the effect of loss of chastity. Once given or taken or stolen it can never be regained. Even in forced contact such as rape or incest, the injured one is greatly outraged. If she has not cooperated and contributed to the foul deed, she is of course in a more favorable position. There is no condemnation where there is absolutely no voluntary participation. It is better to die in defending one's virtue than to live having lost it without a struggle."

Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*

So while the Church 'works' in many respects, for many of its members, creating communities, providing a sense of purpose, and opportunities for service, there are clear and present dangers, some more obvious than others, affecting both genders, and all age groups.

And when these dangers are seen in the context of critical examination of the actual claims of the Church, where the evidence is compellingly stacked against the truthfulness of those claims, the need for members to very carefully examine their minds, their hearts, their beliefs, their actions, and their commitments, becomes crucial.