

(original post found at www.mostlymormon.com)

This is that angry letter you write and then tear up, only I'm not going to.

Maybe instead I should go to the garage and beat on a punching bag or go shoot some guns, but I don't own a punching bag and my newly developed liberalism has me a little uncertain about where guns fit into my life anymore.

I'm still angry.

I guess I don't know what I expected. I think I'm surprised that an angry ex-mormon has been bleeding through my personality lately. It hasn't even been a year since leaving the church and no, I can't leave it alone. I think about it every day, despite my best efforts. They don't make it easy to ignore.

Early this year, my boss pulled me into his office to ask me what was wrong. My personal life had manifest itself in my professional life and he noticed. I was visibly upset. To his credit, he genuinely wanted to know if he could help. He was concerned about my wellbeing. He's a good person, a good Mormon.

He was understanding and supportive when I divulged that my wife and I were leaving the church and explained some of the reasons why. But the one part of that conversation that sticks with me more than anything else is when he finished by saying 'just don't become one of those angry ex-mormon types'. Out of politeness, I chuckled and told him that I intended to slip silently into a quiet corner and behave myself.

Asking those who leave the church out of moral objections to its core teachings and beliefs to not be an angry 'ex-mormon' is kind of like asking a cancer patient to not be angry about their diagnosis. It shows the complete lack of understanding 'faithful' members of the church have for the 'apostates'.

The church was my world. It dictated every pivotal decision I ever made. It shaped my opinions, my ideas, my entire view of reality. It wasn't just taken from me, it betrayed me. It wounded me. It lied to me. And when I questioned it, it blamed me and turned everyone I loved against me! Then it told me to not be angry.

Big tent Mormonism doesn't exist. The church has effectively put a label on everyone and placed them into compartments and there are only certain compartments that are welcome in the mainstream. I wait for a signal from Salt Lake that would help loved ones better understand why I would make such a drastic change in my life, but all I seem to hear are messages of separation and segregation. Analogies of boats are tossed around like pass along cards, re-enforcing an 'Us vs. Them' mentality. Man cannot serve God and Mammon, and they never let you forget which side they represent, and by extension, which side I represent.

And while boat analogies have no effect on me, I know what they do to active members' perception of me, and it makes me angry. I am the constant recipient of slanderous comments from a group of men who claim to have a personal and 'special' relationship with Jesus Christ. They tell their congregation that I am a liar, I am deceived, I lack courage, I have taken the easy road, I have jumped off of ship Zion, I ignore the spirit, and I was never fully committed or converted in the first place.

Under normal circumstances anyone hearing these types of accusations cast in the direction of any doubter would be able to quickly dismiss them as the unfair generalizations they are. But we are not talking about normal circumstances.

First, let's look at the source.

The leadership of the church has carefully and cleverly placed themselves in a position where their authority cannot be questioned. You are asked to pledge them your allegiance as a pre-requisite to receive saving ordinances. They hold your eternal family hostage by withholding temple recom-

mends to anyone unable to profess belief in their divine calling as God's representatives. No fewer than four times per year, members are asked to raise their hand to the square in a sustaining vote of approval of their appointment. Those who oppose their authority are excommunicated. Those who vow absolute dedication and obedience to them are promoted. Children sing their praises, becoming convinced through their most formative years that if they follow the prophet, follow the prophet, follow the prophet, he won't lead them astray. Members hang on their every word, turning every clever phrase or anecdote into a vinyl wall decoration or t-shirt, available for purchase at the Lord's bookstore. Regardless of their true intentions, the church cultivates a thriving culture of leader worship exists and thrives.

Second, let's look at the target.

The mob sitting in the pews every Sunday embracing these 'precious truths' is the same mob claiming that Joseph Smith's marriages to 14-year-old girls and other men's wives actually strengthen their collective testimony. Then again, should I really expect empathy, reason, or logic from a group who believes that denying baptism to the children of homosexuals somehow is a divinely-inspired protective measure? Should I really expect this same group to defend me against attacks from LDS apostles who call me a coward for doubting the Book of Mormon's historicity? After all, this is the same group of people who excitedly fill my Facebook feed with shouts of joy every six months, proclaiming conference weekend to be the best weekend of the year! That's right. Their best weekend is spent learning new words like ponderize and spreading internet memes about doubting doubts. I don't stand a chance against their pre-determined opinions of me, opinions pre-determined by their infallible leaders.

I often ask myself what it would take for the most ardent supporters of the LDS faith to break form and question their convictions. What would it take for them to hear the hurtful and xenophobic teachings of their leaders the same way I hear them? What would it take for them to knock Joseph Smith down a few rungs, to question the authenticity of his tall-tale?

If you ask one of these 'defenders of the truth', they would tell you 'NOTHING, nothing could or ever will shake my testimony.'

And while statements like this are infuriatingly close minded and short sighted, strangely enough, they actually lower my pulse and stop me from seeing red.

'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference' -Serenity Prayer

When I hear someone say nothing can or will change their mind about any particular topic, I quickly realize I am dealing with an irrational person and there is NOTHING I can do to change that. They will continue to follow their leaders regardless of the perceived irrationalism of the instruction, and there is nothing I can do to change that. They will continue to see me as the apostate they have been told that I am, and there is nothing I can do to change that. They will continue to defend church policy and church apologetics in the face of social outcry and empirical evidence, and there is nothing I can do to change that.

And despite the hurt and loss that I feel regarding the meaningful (but damaged) relationships in my life, I can rest easy knowing the difference between the opinions people have of me, which I cannot change, and the opinions that I have of myself and my decision to suspend belief.