



# “BEWARE LEST YE ARE DECEIVED”: LATTER-DAY APOSTASY AND CHURCH BREAK-OFFS

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“Beware lest ye are deceived” (D&C 46:8).

## WHAT IS APOSTASY?

“For purposes of church discipline, the Church currently defines apostasy as (1) repeatedly acting in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders; (2) persisting in teaching as church doctrine information that is not church doctrine, after being corrected by one’s bishop or higher authority; or (3) continuing to follow the teachings of apostate cults (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by one’s bishop or higher authority. Total inactivity in the Church or merely attending another church does not constitute apostasy” (Dallin H. Oaks, *The Lord’s Way* [1991], 247).

“We could conceive of a man honestly differing in opinion from the authorities of the Church and yet not be an apostate; but we could not conceive of a man publishing those differences of opinion, and seeking by arguments, sophistry and special pleading to enforce them upon the people to produce division and strife, and to place the acts and counsels of the authorities of the Church, if possible, in a wrong light, and not be an apostate, for such conduct was apostasy as we understood the term. We further said that while a man might honestly differ in opinion from the authorities through a want of understanding, he had to be exceedingly careful how he acted in relation to such differences, or the adversary would take advantage of him and he would soon become imbued with the spirit of apostasy, and be found fighting against God and the authority which He had placed here to govern His Church” (George Q. Cannon, “What Is Apostasy?” *Deseret News*, 3 Nov. 1869, 457).

## EFFECTS OF APOSTASY

“All that want to draw a party from the church after them, let them do it if they can, but they will not prosper.

“If any man thinks he has influence among this people to lead away a party, let him try it, and he will find out that there is power with the apostles which will carry them victorious through all the world, and build up and defend the church and kingdom of God” (Brigham Young, in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2:417).

“The Lord said in one of the early revelations before the organization of the Church that the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. Then he said if a man should labor all his days and convert but one soul, he should have great joy in the kingdom of our Father, and if he should convert many souls, then much greater would be that joy. [D&C 18:10–16.] Reversing the picture, he who blinds one soul, he who spreads error, he who

destroys, through his teachings, divine truth, truth that would lead a man to the kingdom of God and to its fulness, how great shall be his condemnation and his punishment in eternity. For the destruction of a soul is the destruction of the greatest thing that has ever been created” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Take Heed to Yourselves!* [1966], 190).

## THINGS THAT CAN LEAD TO APOSTASY

### 1. Unrepented Serious Transgression

“There has been no greater cause of apostasy in this Church than the want of virtue. You can predict the future of a man who is guilty of sins of this kind, unless he repents, as sure as you can predict that darkness will follow the setting of the sun” (George Q. Cannon, “Enduring to the End,” in *Collected Discourses*, comp. Brian H. Stuy, 5 vols. [1987–92], 2:117–18).

### 2. Finding Fault and Murmuring

“I will give you one of the Keys of the mysteries of the Kingdom. It is an eternal principle, that has existed with God from all eternity: That man who rises up to condemn others, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that that man is in the high road to apostasy; and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives” (Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 3:385).

“The counsel against speaking evil of Church leaders is not so much for the benefit of the leaders as it is for the spiritual well-being of members who are prone to murmur and find fault. The Church leaders I know are durable people. They made their way successfully in a world of unrestrained criticism before they received their current callings. They have no personal need for protection; they seek no personal immunities from criticism—constructive or destructive. They only seek to declare what they understand to be the word of the Lord to his people” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Criticism,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1987, 70).

### 3. Trying to “Steady the Ark”

“Let the kingdom alone, the Lord steadies the ark; and if it does jostle, and appear to need steadying, if the way is a little sideling sometimes, and to all appearance threatens its overthrow, be careful how you stretch forth your hands to steady it; let us not be too officious in meddling with that which does not concern us; let it alone, it is the Lord’s work. I know enough to let the kingdom alone, and do my duty. It carries me, I do not carry the kingdom” (Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:252).

“There was a prevalent spirit all through the early history of this Church, which prompted the Elders to suppose that they

knew more than the Prophet. Elders would tell you that the prophet was going wrong, men who thought they knew all about this work thirty or forty years some of them before the Lord revealed it, tried 'to steady the ark.' The Church was constantly afflicted with such a class of men" (George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:7).

#### 4. Desire for Wealth, Power, and Fame

"There were many to whom the Lord had revealed things and blessed them in many ways. But they could not withstand the temptations of the world. But they went to work and increased their wealth in a way that God was not pleased with. They grasped at every opportunity to get wealth in a way that was displeasing to the Almighty. Hence some of them apostatized in consequence of their indulging in that spirit. I wish to make these statements for the benefit of the Latter-day Saints. Listen to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, that when such things are brought before us to tempt us we may have power to lay them one side" (Lorenzo Snow, "Strengthening Power of Persecution," in *Collected Discourses*, 1:91).

"Apostasy is born of priestcrafts . . . , for those who engage in them follow vain things, teach false doctrines, love riches, and aspire to personal honors" (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 593).

#### 5. Being Deceived—Receiving or Believing False Revelation

"Be ever on guard lest you be deceived by inspiration from an unworthy source. You can be given false spiritual messages. There are counterfeit spirits just as there are counterfeit angels. (See Moro. 7:17.) Be careful lest you be deceived, for the devil may come disguised as an angel of light.

"The spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual. We occasionally find people who receive what they assume to be spiritual promptings from God, when those promptings are either centered in the emotions or are from the adversary.

"Avoid like a plague those who claim that some great spiritual experience authorizes them to challenge the constituted priesthood authority in the Church. Do not be unsettled if you cannot explain every insinuation of the apostate or every challenge from the enemies who attack the Lord's church. And we now face a tidal wave of that. In due time you will be able to confound the wicked and inspire the honest in heart" (Boyd K. Packer, "The Candle of the Lord," *Ensign*, Jan. 1983, 55–56).

"It never ceases to amaze me how gullible some of our Church members are in broadcasting sensational stories, or dreams, or visions, or purported patriarchal blessings, or quotations, or supposedly from some person's private diary" (Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 55).

#### 6. Pride

"Pride is a sin that can readily be seen in others but is rarely admitted in ourselves. Most of us consider pride to be a sin of those on the top, such as the rich and the learned, looking down at the rest of us (see 2 Nephi 9:42). There is, however, a far more common ailment among us—and that is pride from the

bottom looking up. It is manifest in so many ways, such as faultfinding, gossiping, backbiting, murmuring, living beyond our means, envying, coveting, withholding gratitude and praise that might lift another, and being unforgiving and jealous.

"Disobedience is essentially a prideful power struggle against someone in authority over us. It can be a parent, a priesthood leader, a teacher, or ultimately God. A proud person hates the fact that someone is above him. He thinks this lowers his position.

"Selfishness is one of the more common faces of pride. 'How everything affects me' is the center of all that matters—self-conceit, self-pity, worldly self-fulfillment, self-gratification, and self-seeking.

"Pride results in secret combinations which are built up to get power, gain, and glory of the world. . . .

"Pride is the universal sin, the great vice. . . .

"Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion" (Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 5–7; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 5–7).

### HOW CAN WE REMAIN FAITHFUL?

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"I suppose there would never be an apostate, there would never be a crime, if people remembered, really remembered, the things they had covenanted at the water's edge or at the sacrament table and in the temple" (Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 112).

"No man goes away from this Church and becomes an apostate in a week, nor in a month. It is a slow process. The one thing that would make for the safety of every man and woman would be to appear at the sacrament table every Sabbath day. We would not get very far away in one week—not so far away that, by the process of self-investigation, we could not rectify the wrongs we may have done" (Melvin J. Ballard, "The Sacramental Covenant," *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1919, 1028).

"It is through this neglect of duty that so many have left this Church and kingdom of God" (Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:282).

"Watch yourselves . . . , and perish not" (Mosiah 4:30).

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