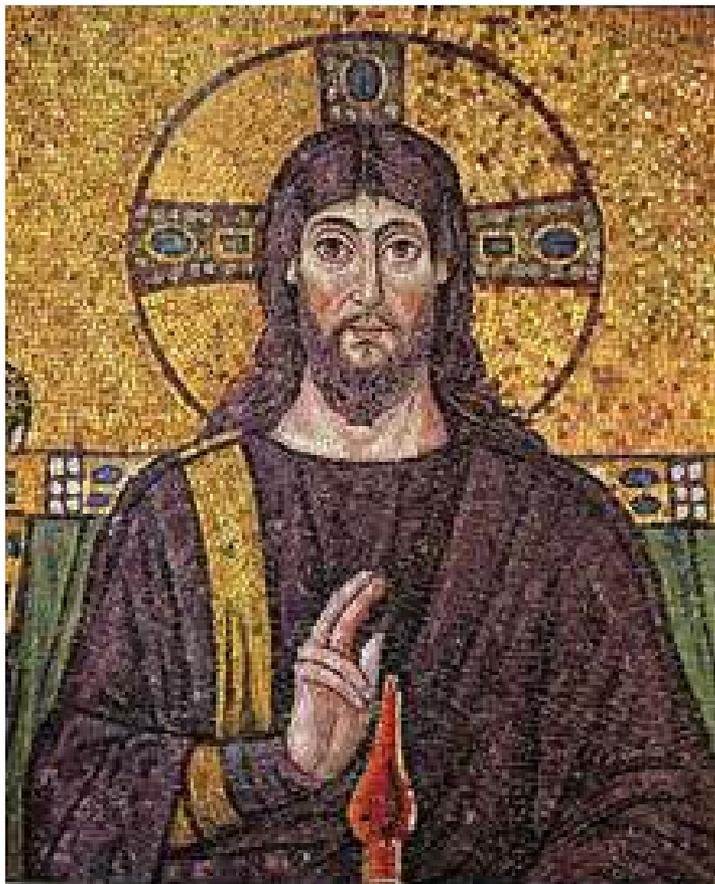


# Lessons from the great apostasy



AN EXPLORATION OF PATTERNS AND PRINCIPLES  
APPLICABLE IN ALL DISPENSATIONS

**"Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not."**

**-Brigham Young**

**"Every Church member has not only the opportunity right, and privilege to receive a personal witness regarding gospel principles and Church practices, but has the need and obligation to obtain such assurance"**

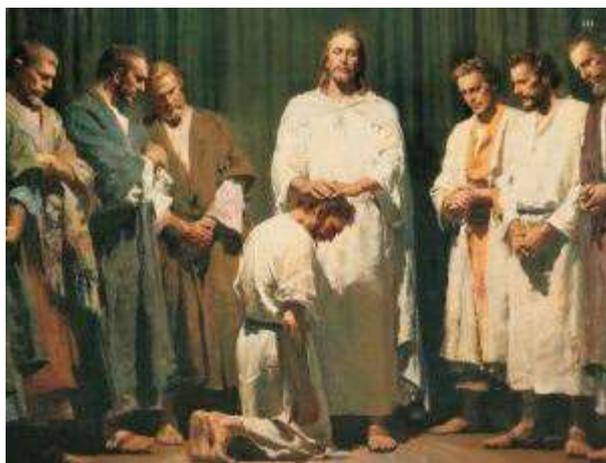
**"When we understand the difference between the gospel and the church and the appropriate function of each in our daily lives, we are much more likely to do the right things for the right reasons."**

**-Elder Poelman**

# of the first Quorum of the Seventy, Gen. Conf. 1984

## Lessons from the Great Apostasy

The Great Apostasy happened many years ago, but many people are still affected by it. By looking at the great apostasy we not only learn about the past, but our minds can be brought to understand the actions we must take in the future. The lessons you learn will be up to you. If you look at these events with God as the center of your life you will understand and be able to see ways to improve your life. If you look at this with a closed mind, and you prefer traditions over revelation, then you will learn nothing.



A great many years ago Christ came to the Earth and set in motion events that would build up his church. There were people ordained as Apostles and prophets. They witnessed of Christ and taught his Words. While these people were not perfect, many of

them tried very hard to obey the words of Christ. Slowly more people began to see the truth of Christ's Words. They accepted his teachings and gathered together as the body of Christ (aka the church).

These people shared all that they had. For a time they were able to worship at the temple. In fact they met there regularly. They worshiped together in small intimate groups.

But something happened. Many of the people around them could not understand Christ's teachings. They thought these people were some strange group. These people rose up and persecuted the followers of Christ. Eventually they even killed the very one who began this movement. These wicked people thought that they had defeated these Christians. They thought that with the leader dead these followers of Christ would disband. Many Apostles were also killed.



After this there began to be divisions among the people. Doctrines became corrupted, and many people tried to gain followers and lead the church. But there was one main

group of Christians that really took off. However there was a problem. Revelation began to cease among the leaders. With no more revelation, the teachings of Christ began to be corrupted. Doctrines and ordinances were changed.

They changed the ordinance of Baptism. They also changed the ordinance of the Sacrament. They taught that they no longer had to share everything they had. They stopped worshiping at the temple daily. They changed the Word of God in the Scriptures.

These Christians were persecuted severely by the nations of that time, and even hunted down and killed. But eventually the killing stopped when this Church subjected itself to the government. As the Church compromised more and more, it became more and more accepted by the people and the government. Eventually the leaders of the Church were highly favored of the government leadership.

This Church became rich and began to build huge ornate buildings. They rejected the poor and began charging money to worship. This Church, rather than trying to unify with others, persecuted those who



left or belonged to different faiths. There were many who began to look at the things this Church was doing and to compare them to the Holy Scriptures. They saw there were many differences between what Christ taught and what this Church was doing. When they left to try and live as the scriptures taught they were persecuted.

This Church that was founded many years ago, still exists today. These corruptions of doctrine and ordinances are accepted as truth by many good people. And that is the real problem that allowed this great apostasy. There were very few people who actually set out to corrupt the Church. Rather these issues, and fallings away, happened because well-meaning people thought up a simple solution to a problem. Or maybe there was a slightly different way of doing things. There's no harm in being more efficient is there? With just a small imperceptible change in the angle of a rudder, a ship can end up far off course.

Nobody out and out said that they want to lead these Christians into apostasy. Rather they all said that it was part of the plan. The people could not detect the small changes that occurred and all the time thought they were doing God's will. There was no official proclamation that the Church had gone into apostasy and the people didn't recognize that things had gone astray. These were good people who were too blinded by traditions to stop and look and compare where they were, with where they should be.

But fortunately God is in control. And while the path taken by these people was a long and hard one, just like the Ancient

Israelites before, there was hope. For before any of this happened God had promised that there would be a restitution of all things. He will fulfill all His promises. And in spite of this great apostasy which fell upon this church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, there is hope. Christ will triumph and Zion will be established. But if we want to have a part in this, we must awaken to our current state.

Many who read this will be surprised, thinking that the church just described was the ancient Christian Church, the Catholic Church, or one of the Orthodox sects. While it is true that they followed this pattern of apostasy, we must be awakened to our awful situation that we are following the same path. This story is about us, the latter day church of Christ, not the ancient church of Christ. My purpose is to illustrate that we have fallen into the same path of error that the ancient church did. So much so that as you read the above description of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, in MODERN times, you thought you were reading a description of the apostasy of the ancient church.

And just as in ancient times, our leaders, no matter what sect of Mormonism you belong to, do not get up and announce that we are in apostasy. No. Instead we continue operating under the assumption that the Holy Spirit is guiding our every action. Just as the ancient Christians did, we believe that our practices and policies are approved by God, because some leader with the title of Prophet, President, Elder, (or pope) announced it. But you, me, and all of us must wake up. We have to look at the scriptures and history and say, "Wait, what we're doing right now is not how God revealed it should be done." Then after we come to a realization of our awful state we must repent, changing our ways, and bring ourselves into compliance with God's commandments.

Many of you reading this will likely feel upset or even angered. How dare I speak against the Church. How could I write such evil things against the Lord's one True Church. Surely I must be an apostate anti-Mormon. But my brothers and sisters, I didn't write this to attack Mormonism. I wrote this to support Mormonism. The same Mormonism which has been corrupted by

modern Churches. The same Mormonism that was restored by The Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. I didn't write this to tear you down. I wrote it to tear down your false assumptions and build you up!

And now I take the words of the great prophet Alma as my own:

***Alma 7:22-25***

22 And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him, that ye may walk after the holy order of God, after which ye have been received.

23 And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.

24 And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.

25 And may the Lord bless you, and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless even as their garments are spotless, in the kingdom of heaven to go no more out.

Consider also these prophetic words from the president of the church, Joseph Fielding Smith: " It is easy for one who observes to see how the apostasy came about in the Primitive Church of Jesus Christ. Are we not traveling the same road?"<sup>1</sup>

Please, please, please! It's time to stop playing Church. It's time to stop playing dress up. Look around you! Members are now leaving the Church faster than new ones join. We are corrupting and rejecting our doctrines so that we can look good to the world. We want to be known as the common normal person, not the salt

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, personal journal, Dec 28, 1938 and quoted in *Life of Joseph Fielding Smith*, Joseph Fielding Smith & John J. Stewart, Deseret Book 1972, page 212.

of the earth. We spend our money on MULTI-BILLION dollar shopping malls. We are building temples, but no longer perform the ordinances in them in the manner God commanded.

Haven't you ever felt that excitement, that anticipation, of the day when someone will finally say, Let's go to Jackson county and build Zion. Well, that call came over 100 years ago and was never rescinded. We are commanded to build Zion now! I finally realized that that call would never come in any general conference. The leaders of the Church will never stand up and announce that it is time to finally live the law of consecration and build Zion. I realized that we must act NOW if we want to see Zion. If we are waiting to be commanded in all things we will be rejected by God. Come, let's live by every Word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God. Let us make Zion happen, now!

This chart is to reference the claims I made above. You can truly see that we have followed the same path as the ancient Christian Church. Unless we take action now we will blindly fall into deeper apostasy until we are no different from our Catholic brothers.

The Description of The  
Church of Jesus Christ of  
Latter-Day Saints as found  
above:

The specifics:

Christ came to the Earth and set in motion events that would build up his church.	First Vision, 1820
People ordained as Apostles and prophets	Joseph Smith and early Church leaders ordained and given keys.
These people shared all that they had.	Law of Consecration and the United Order
For a time they were able to worship at the temple.	The Kirtland Temple
The people rose up and persecuted the followers of Christ.	Early Persecution in Ohio Missouri, Illinois
Eventually they even killed the very one who began this movement.	June 27, 1844 Martyrdom of Joseph Smith, Jr.

There began to be divisions among the people.	1844 Succession Crisis: RLDS, and all manner of "-ites" then again in the 1920s with apostle and patriarchal excommunications and the rise of the "fundamentalist" sects
One main group that really took off.	Followers of Brigham Young, later another schism under Heber J. Grant. The mainstream Church is the only one of all these groups with over one million members.
Revelation began to cease among the leaders.	Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff, received and published revelations to the church, (The last revelation to the church was in 1889). Lorenzo Snow and Joseph F. Smith both received personal revelation but never published it. Heber J. Grant proclaimed that the Heavens were as brass before him. Gordon B. Hinkley even proclaimed that "we don't need much revelation anymore."
Doctrines and ordinances were changed.	The Endowment has been changed many times since it was revealed. Even the symbols and the parts considered most sacred have been changed! Other ordinances have been discarded altogether.
They changed the ordinance of Baptism.	Re-baptism was a revealed ordinance for sins and for healing. It was abandoned in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.
They also changed the ordinance of the Sacrament.	Doctrine and Covenants Section 20 states that Priest can only administer the sacrament if no elders are present. The sacrament used to be given in large portions so that those who ate would be filled. Today it is not even enough to make a snack.
They taught that they no longer shared everything they had.	Over time the law of Consecration and the United Order fell out of favor. Many Mormons believe that tithing was given as a preparatory law. But this is not true. The revelation on tithing states clearly that Tithing is part of the law of Consecration. The law of tithing has been changed from its revealed purpose.
They stopped worshipping at the temple daily.	The temples were designed to be the center of Mormon life.
They changed the Word of God in the Scriptures.	In 1921 Heber J. Grant removed the Lectures on Faith from the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lectures on Faith are the Doctrine part of the title "Doctrine and Covenants." He also denied many of the uncanonized revelations received by his predecessors.
These Christians were persecuted severely by the nations of the day and even hunted down and killed.	United States government, the Missouri and Illinois governments, and many mobs of irate sectarians persecuted the Church.

<p>As the Church compromised its ordinances and teachings more and more it became more and more accepted by the people and the government.</p>	<p>In 1923 President Grant established the "Corporation of the President" mortgaged Temple Square, and put the tithing funds of the church into Chase Manhattan Bank. He started excommunicating anyone who dissented. (After taking these and other steps to satisfy the world he acknowledged "My greatest happiness I find in the goodwill and friendship that has developed among all classes of people at home and abroad toward the LDS church during my lifetime. In place of early-day persecution and bitterness we now enjoy high regard and happy associations with all denominations." (Improvement Era 4:394)</p>
<p>Eventually the leaders of the Church were highly favored of the government leadership.</p>	<p>Today leaders of the Church freely mingle with world leaders.</p>
<p>This Church became rich and began to build huge ornate buildings.</p>	<p>The Church now owns billions of dollars worth of real estate. The Church builds fancy temples, a conference center, hotels, shopping malls, etc.</p>
<p>They rejected the poor and began charging money to worship.</p>	<p>While the Church does give to the poor, that amount is less than 1% of the amount of income the church receives from donations. Millions are starving while the Church builds a mall in Salt lake City. In order to worship within the walls of the temple, or hold most church positions, one must pay ten percent of all their income to the Church.</p>
<p>This Church, rather than trying to unify with others, persecuted those who left or belonged to different churches.</p>	<p>Instead of trying to unify the diverse voices of Mormonism the mainstream Church condemns them as "apostates" and routinely excommunicates scholars and other members who question church positions and policies.</p>
<p>When they left to try and live as the scriptures taught they were persecuted by the Church.</p>	<p>Anyone who tries to teach something that is scriptural but not in line with modern policies is persecuted. Those who live as God commanded are excommunicated</p>

## So, What is Apostasy?

I'm a devout believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ as restored through Joseph Smith. But since my religion relies for its claims to legitimacy upon divine revelation and nothing else, I am also skeptical of the many false doctrines that have accreted over the years like stubborn barnacles on a ship's hull.

Mormonism consists of a lot of wonderful teachings that come to us directly from God. But many of us have also come to

embrace an assortment of "foolish traditions and vain assertions" that, over time and through constant repetition, have mingled with the divine until often we can't tell the true from the false. These traditions are like urban legends that refuse to die. It should be the desire of all good latter-day Saints to be on guard against the faith being diluted, but based on some of the feedback I sometimes get, perhaps not. I have engaged in many fruitless discussions with those who accuse me of being "out of harmony with the Church." They would never see it this way, but by my way of thinking, those guys are the real apostates. I like to get in there and scrape those barnacles off so I can see the shiny surface underneath. So let's strip away the rhetoric and look at what apostasy actually is.

Since the word "apostasy" has developed such a nasty stigma within the church, let's look at that word as it was understood at the time of the founding of our faith. According to Noah Webster's original 1828 dictionary, apostasy "in its original sense, applied to one who has abandoned his religion."

Well, that isn't me. I haven't abandoned my religion. I embrace it. I spend more time immersed in my religion than at any time in my life. I love the history, I love the theology; I love it all.

Apparently my dedication to the gospel isn't the issue with some people. Through my conversations with those who accuse me of apostasy, the thing that seems to frustrate them more than anything is that I don't appear to show what one commenter called "proper loyalty to the Church."

Mankind is inclined toward idolatry. The church has become a great idol for so many. Why should anyone be "Loyal to the church"? except in as far as the church is loyal to the gospel. It is loyalty to principle that must be our standard, not loyalty to the church. To substitute your loyalty to God as loyalty to the church, on the assumption that the church and God are in harmony is to set up a idol and abandon God. This is true even if the church and God are in perfect alignment! The scriptures are clear about who we are to have faith in: Jesus Christ. Putting your trust in the church or

general or local authorities is putting your faith in the arm of flesh, the very apex of idol worship.

## **Don't Worry, There's Still Hope**

In truth, we are all apostatizing. All the time. After all, we're only human. Usually, being in apostasy simply means we've diverted slightly from our intended goal. That's why repentance is a daily process; it doesn't always have to be performed in sack cloth and ashes. If our foot inadvertently slips off the curb, it's usually no big problem to step back on the sidewalk and continue on our way. We simply resolve to learn from our mistakes, make a slight course correction, and we're back on track. Repentance is often just a series of minor course corrections.

Lucky for us, the Book of Mormon provides a guide to help us recognize when we're headed into apostasy: the dream of Lehi. We all know the story, but some have misinterpreted a pertinent part of it: that part about the iron rod.

The short version goes like this: In his dream, Lehi saw a vast field. In the center of the field was a beautiful tree bearing some incredibly good tasting fruit. We learn that this fruit represents the love of God, and it tastes spectacular. It's like nothing else in the universe. Lehi sees other people in his dream walking toward that tree. That's where everyone was headed, to get a taste of some of that amazing fruit.

I have heard some members assume the tree and its fruit represented heaven, or the celestial kingdom, or the reward at the end of our lives. But that does not appear to be the proper interpretation. The fruit represents the love of God, something within reach of all of us at any time while we're here, and which we can partake of daily if we want. We can take a break from life, be nourished and refreshed, then continue on. That tree is always there; all we have to do to experience that love is reach out and accept it. Neither is the tree described as being a great distance away. When Lehi saw it, he just went over and partook of the fruit. I take it that wherever we are or whatever we're doing, if we

want to, we can take a moment and bask in the love of God at any time.

To get to that tree, you have to stay on the path that leads to it, otherwise you could wander off, get lost, or simply overshoot the tree in the dark. Running parallel to the path, Lehi noticed a rod made of iron, a handrail, if you will. Mists of darkness rose up around the people on the path, causing many to wander off, most not even realizing they were no longer even heading in the right direction. But those who clung to the rod were able to make it over to the tree and enjoy the sweet, delicious fruit.

Now, there is a lot more to that dream, but this much will suffice. We learn that the handrail, the rod of iron, has only one interpretation. Nephi tells us it stands for "the word of God." In order for us to experience the *love* of God, the safest way of reaching it is by grabbing hold and clinging to the *word* of God.

Note that the iron rod does NOT represent "the Church," nor Church leaders, general authorities, or any man or group of men. The only safe guide is the word of God.

Anyone letting go of that handrail and clinging instead to another person in hopes of being guided through the darkness is likely to end up in a ditch. The blind leading the blind, and all that.

Despite what any of us have been told, there is no place in the word of God that teaches there is safety in "following the leaders." Indeed, the scriptures specifically warn against depending upon what the Lord calls "the arm of flesh."<sup>2</sup> God did not send you down here then assign leaders to be in charge of you. We must "work out our own salvation" by relying only on Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. This popular idea that the only true path to safety is in "following the Brethren" simply cannot be found anywhere in

<sup>2</sup> See: 2 Chr. 32:8, Ps. 20:7, Ps. 44:6, Ps. 146:3, Prov. 3:5, Prov. 11:28, Prov. 28:26, Isa. 2:8 (2 Ne. 12:8), Isa. 2:22 (2 Ne. 12:22), Isa. 30:2, Isa. 59:4, Jer. 17:5, Micah 7:5, Rom. 8:1, Philip. 3:3, 2 Ne. 4:34, 2 Ne. 28:31, Mosiah 23:14, D&C 1:19, D&C 3:7, D&C 5:21, Isa. 28:15; Isa. 31:1; Isa. 36:6; Jer. 7:8; Luke 6:26; Luke 6:39; 2 Ne. 19:16; Mosiah 23:14; D&C 76:61.

the revealed word of God.

For a group of people who claim a religion based solely on direct revelation, we Mormons sure seem ready to adopt a whole set of beliefs that can't be traced to any scripture or revelation. Critics often insist on asserting the following points as if they were actual, revealed doctrines:

- It is impossible for the president of the Church to ever lead the church astray.
- This Church can never fall into apostasy.
- The only sure safety is in following the leaders of the Church.
- Whatever the Brethren speak over the pulpit at conference is the same as if it came from the mouth of God.

No verse in all of scripture supports ANY of these contentions; indeed, the standard works are replete with passages that would clearly refute them. Moroni lamented that we in the latter days would pollute the holy church of God,<sup>3</sup> and Jesus himself assures us that the church in the latter days was indeed capable of failing.<sup>4</sup>

Whenever I ask to be provided a citation from the standard works that might support statements like these, I am given instead endless quotes from general authorities; quotes that don't purport to be direct revelations from God, but are accepted by these people as such merely on the basis of their having been uttered by men with high callings and titles. Unless God said it, or the speaker claims to be relaying a direct revelation, such utterances do not constitute the word of God himself, no matter how much you may want to believe they do. Joseph Smith taught that we need not heed the opinion of any professor of religion that contradicts scripture or previous revelation.

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<sup>3</sup> Mormon 8:33-38

<sup>4</sup> 3 Nephi 16:10

## Is the Church capable of Apostasy?

I do not believe in a black and white apostasy as some do. I believe that there are varying degrees of apostasy and that all of us to some degree or another are in apostasy. That is the nature of the fallen man. I believe that the LDS church which was restored by Joseph Smith has rejected many of the principles restored by Joseph Smith. And in many cases prefers to live according to corporate policies and traditions rather than the previously given revelations. However I do not believe that all light and truth is gone from the LDS church.

I believe that the One Mighty and Strong<sup>5</sup> has come to set in order the house of God and arrange by lot the inheritances of the Saints, as prophesied by Joseph Smith. In order for this to have occurred it necessitates that the church must be out of order and we can clearly see that the church today bears little resemblance to the church of a hundred years ago.

I do not believe that God has withdrawn his previous revelations. He still wants us to obey them. I believe we must cast off the past hundred or so years of traditions, dogma, and creeds, and return to the basic, simple, pure teachings of the restoration. After we do that, then we can move forward again and receive those things God has in store for this people, including the establishment of Zion.

The real apostates in the church are those who have supplanted the foundational religion with a different one; a religion that insists that obedience to earthly authority is the greatest measure of one's faithfulness to God. *That* is what apostasy looks like to me: a turning away from the accepted word of God in favor of clinging to the arm of flesh.

The internet is now overflowing with articles not only proving a modern apostasy is taking place right under our noses, but that our scriptures and teachings foretold it and warned us about it. Clearly, there is a growing sense of unease in the church,

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<sup>5</sup> D&C 85:7

a feeling that all is not going so well in Zion after all.

You will note that these bloggers rarely concern themselves with those among us who, for various reasons, have simply decided to leave the church. Although they certainly fit the dictionary definition of apostasy, they are not a threat to those who remain. In my opinion, their departure is symptomatic of blowback; of the unintended consequences resulting from the institutional Church having drifted from its core fundamentals.

The real apostates, the ones who pose an immediate danger to the community, are those who are undermining the church from within by advocating positions that are doctrinally indefensible. They simply cannot be supported anywhere in scripture. These are the "True Believers;" they who have set themselves up as defenders of the faith, yet exert themselves not in defending Christ, but in angrily attacking those whose focus *is* on Christ. Rather than being watchmen on the wall, they prefer to expend their energies rebuking the watchmen.

"The church," which was widely understood in Joseph Smith's day to mean nothing more than a group of people with shared religious values, today represents, in the minds of many, something entirely separate from that body. Indeed, these days members of the Lord's "church" (lower case "c" as defined in D&C 10; i.e. the members) are now by and large considered subservient to "the Church" (which I differentiate here with a capital "C" in order to avoid confusing the two). The "church" and the "Church(TM)" have now separated into two separate classes, the leaders and the followers. As a leader recently said: "leaders lead, and followers are expected to follow."

The once egalitarian LDS Church is today manifested by a top-down hierarchy consisting of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, numerous Assistants to the Twelve, the First Quorum of the Seventy and the Second Quorum of the Seventy along with their armies of staff and assistants, all housed in a 28 story skyscraper that is also home to teams of corporate lawyers,

scribes, and public relations experts. It is my detached indifference to this institutional, corporate body that for some reason most annoys my critics.

This idea that the Church's "leaders" exist to hold our hands and guide our every step is contrary to the purposes to which God ordained them, and unsuitable to a people whose doctrine teaches that within every one of us lies the potential for personal godhood. These Church officers are ordained to very specific purposes, none of which is to give you your marching orders or to embody "safety from the storm." That role is reserved to Christ alone. The Brethren, though often inspired, are not what Nephi was referring to when he told us the interpretation of the rod of iron. The Brethren are human, just like you and me, and just as fallible. As Joseph Smith declared, "a prophet is a prophet only when he speaks as a prophet."

Sadly, many members of the church today believe the prophet is a prophet every time he opens his mouth, and often even when he doesn't. This has led to a disconcerting cult of personality within the church that is equaled only by some Catholics with their pope.

The purpose of the institutional Church in our lives is similar to that of the role of our parents. It provides a certain kind of sustenance for us when we are in our spiritual infancy. But the idea is to quickly get to the point in our spiritual growth where we no longer need someone holding our hand to cross the street.

In his famous original conference talk "The Gospel and the Church" Elder Poelman reminds us that "as individually and collectively we increase our knowledge, acceptance, and application of gospel principles, *we become less dependent on Church programs*. Our lives become *gospel centered*."

In contrast, the mantra we hear so often today to "follow the prophet-don't go astray" is a 20th century invention that was completely unknown in Joseph Smith's day. It would not have entered Brother Joseph's mind to have anyone "follow" him for

their own safety, and none of his counselors ever took the stand at conference and taught that idea. The whole concept would have appalled the Saints who looked to Jesus Christ alone for their salvation.

One way to tell whether you are a child or an adult is to examine your dependency on authority figures: Though many imagine teaching obedience to "authority" to be synonymous with teaching right and wrong, the two are actually opposites...In fact, teaching obedience drastically hinders the social and mental development of children. After having grown up in a situation where they were controlled by others, rewarded for obedience and punished for disobedience, if they ever escape that situation they will have little or no training, and little or no experience or practice, in how to think or act from morals or principles.

If their upbringings have been molded mainly by controlling "authority" figures, people become existentially lost if that control vanishes. In short, people trained to obey "authority" do not know how to be independent, sovereign, responsible human beings, because all their lives they have been intentionally and specifically trained to not use their own judgment.

Certainly we should be willing to pay heed to the prophet of God when he is relaying a message directly from God. That is, after all, what a prophet is for. But when was the last time you remember that ever taking place in the mainstream church? where are the revelations, where are the prophecies? the last recorded revelation addressed to the church was in 1889, and the last section of the D&C contains a personal revelation received nearly a hundred years ago! True we have some policy changes and a couple official declarations of the major policy changes, but where are the revelations supporting such changes? If such revelations even exist why are they not published?

### **How Long Will This Continue?**

Almost thirty years ago President Benson reminded us that early on in this church, the Lord placed the entire church under

condemnation, and he told us why He did. President Benson further announced that this condemnation has not been lifted, nor will it be until we *properly* repent.

What exactly does it mean to be under condemnation? Well, what does it mean when a house is condemned? It means the house is not fit for the owner to live in.

We like to claim that Jesus Christ is the head of this Church, and that the Church is continually guided by Him through direct revelation. But is this still true? Where is the owner of this house, and why doesn't he seem to inhabit it anymore?

I would submit that Jesus loves what he calls "my house," but because of our collective sins he has been forced to become an absentee owner.

Certainly God still reveals himself to us as individuals. But isn't it curious that the very persons we are encouraged by our vain traditions to look to for *collective guidance* from the Lord never seem to offer any new communications from Him? Wouldn't the absence of continuous, regular institutional revelation be a clue that something is terribly wrong in the Church today? Shouldn't the very fact that the Lord has told us the Church as a whole is under condemnation be enough to give us pause and a reason to re-examine our collective assumptions?

And shouldn't it occur to us that perhaps, just maybe, one of the things God has told us to repent of when he said we are not taking seriously "the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, *not only to say, but to do* according to that which I have written," might actually be to rely on *Him* rather than on our "leaders"?

We Mormons are very keen on *saying* we should rely on the word of God for inspiration and on *saying* we believe in seeking guidance from the spirit. But do we regularly "*do according to what [God] has written*"?

No. More often we take the easy way out and trust our leaders to tell us what we need to do. Rarely do we go home and take their words before the Lord, asking for confirmation through the Holy Ghost whether everything we just heard is true and valid for us. Even more rare is the saint who goes home and seeks to know more than what has been taught, who questions what more he could learn from their words, or what may be hidden. How rare is the saint who will ask what is being withheld and what more he can do to progress, rather than simply wait to be instructed in all things.<sup>6</sup> Instead we just trust them. They are the leaders, after all, while we are just the simple rank and file members.

Most of the time the counsel we receive from these men is sound, but sometimes it is not. Regardless, the word of God commands us to seek confirmation from the Holy Ghost regarding *everything* preached from the pulpit. If, however, we have been conditioned to believe that the "authorities" are always inspired and have got it all covered, why should we even bother checking in with heaven?

This over-reliance on Church leaders has stunted our ability to be guided by the spirit. Nephi taught us that it is the role of the Holy Ghost to show us *all* that we should do. He didn't say it was the role of the prophet, or of his counselors, or the apostles, the seventies, or anyone else. Only the Holy Ghost.

I take my orders from the word of God, then seek confirmation through the Holy Ghost. That is how one maneuvers through the mists of darkness.

Of course, this kind of talk is blasphemy to the "Follow the Prophet" crowd. "How dare you," they demand, "ignore the Lord's anointed?"

Well, I don't ignore them. I simply take their pronouncements with a grain of salt until I have it confirmed

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<sup>6</sup> D&C 58:26

whether those promulgations were sent forth from the mouth of God. If not, I may still find their opinions and teachings beneficial and worth considering, but so are many of the pronouncements of other religious leaders such as Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and Alfred Edersham. I may abide by the suggestions of any of these men, but I'm not necessarily going to set my watch by them.

In short, I don't worship idols. Demi-gods may have their place in Greek literature, but they don't belong in the church of Jesus Christ.

## **The Devil's program for Apostasy**

LDS theologian Denver Snuffer<sup>7</sup> explained how Satan is able to successfully keep us from recognizing when we are slipping into apostasy:

"The trick to successfully pulling off an apostasy is to distract people into thinking there hasn't been one. The "believers" need to think everything remains intact.

So the issue of "apostasy" in our discourse becomes a distraction about individuals and individual conformity to the expectations of the group. The subject can then be a topic that polite, fellow-believers can discuss without ever searching into the overall condition of a fallen people.

The Jews mocked efforts to tell them they were apostate.

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<sup>7</sup> Besides being the author of many LDS books Brother Snuffer also is the author of an excellent blog found at: <http://denversnuffer.blogspot.com>

They thought it was humorous when Lehi preached the idea.<sup>8</sup> Because they were so very religious, so devout, so unassailably active in following God, the idea was absolutely laughable to them that they were apostate.

The Apostle Paul said the problem begins at the top with the shepherds, who would teach them falsehoods as truth.<sup>9</sup> These new leaders would have only a form of godliness, without any real power to save.<sup>10</sup>

The people then adopt another, false replacement of the original church. In a former dispensation the result became so universal it was hailed as the Universal, or "Catholic" Church. It ruled from the rivers to the ends of the earth as the only official form of the faith established by Christ, Just as the mainstream church today promotes universal conformity, and the idea that the only legitimate expression of faith must be under its auspices and within the confines of its policies.

To pull this pattern of apostasy off Satan is concerned with the "macro" institutional failure of the church, not just individuals falling away. It is the small, minor spirits who follow Lucifer who engage in petty tempting of individuals to sin. Success for the Adversary is not accomplished in petty enterprises. He wants failure for the whole, so none can be saved. For that, apostasy must be universal.

He has succeeded by preventing us from admitting there has been a failure. The trick is always to have the apostasy come unnoticed, unacknowledged and from within.<sup>11</sup>

The topic is worth studying. When apostasy is noticed, acknowledged and exposed, then it is possible to repent and return. Until then, it progresses apace, discarding and rejecting what might

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Nephi 1:13

<sup>9</sup> Acts 20:29-30

<sup>10</sup> 2 Tim 3:5

<sup>11</sup> See 3 Nephi 16:10

have been given. All the while being happily ignored by "believers" whose devotion will not save.

Since Christ predicted that at some point the Latter-Day Saints would reject the fullness,<sup>12</sup> we probably should consider what the Book of Mormon has to say about the subject. The D&C also contains remarkable statements. Lucifer succeeds when he manages to get us NOT to reject ordinances, but to change them. As soon as they are changed, they are broken.<sup>13</sup> That is an important step. Because then religious people can continue to claim they follow a true religion, while practicing one that has been broken. These practitioners become like the church members before the Babylonian captivity, who mocked Lehi because they knew they were still righteous. They thought Lehi was foolish, even fraudulent. They thought they still had the truth, the ordinances, the temple, and the priesthood. Lehi seemed to be just a mistaken crank."

### **So, Is the Church In Apostasy?**

A better question to ask might be are *you* in apostasy, since *you are the church*. Are you seeking after the gifts of the spirit, or passively trusting in the arm of flesh? Have you sought the baptism of fire, that wonderful, glorious, ineffable experience that hits you like a rush and permeates you and surrounds you and infuses you with love and light and power? Or have you bought into the modern fallacy that what the scriptures mean by "baptism of fire" is really nothing more than "a still, small voice" experienced over time? If fleeting, whispering, tiny, occasional glimpses of the spirit are all you ever expect, that's all you'll ever get. Are you seeking to live consecration? are you actively involved in a Zion united Order community, or are you passively waiting for an announcement in General Conference to actually begin living all of God's Commandments?

Seeing as how our scriptures warn us repeatedly that the church will indeed experience a falling away both individually and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> D&C 1:15

collectively, we would be foolish not to be checking ourselves on a daily basis and making those necessary corrections that keep us on course.

If Satan's trick is always to have the apostasy come unnoticed, perhaps we should put ourselves on notice to be ever watchful against it. The signs that we are well on the way seem pretty clear to me, but I also think the simple corrective is to first stop denying the possibility, and then repent and get back on track.

The scriptures warn us against being complacent; we should not be at ease in Zion. The scriptures warn us that we are under condemnation; we should individually and collectively seek to remove this burden. The scriptures warn us that, because of our pride and practices, we are to lose the fullness of the gospel and its covenant. If we are to regain that which is lost, we must take these warnings to heart, repent, and seek the Lord.

We must all cast off our sleepy rituals and awaken to the duty that must be ours. We must seek in the scriptures the true meaning of the fullness of the gospel. We must each be willing to approach the Father for the knowledge and confirmation of our path. We must, collectively, be willing to make the same covenants as did the people of King Benjamin. We must prepare ourselves to be a Zion people, individually then collectively.

Wake up everyone! wake up good members of the church! open your eyes and see what your complacency and prophet worship are turning this church into. Stop being afraid of making waves, teach the truth. Stop attacking others for thinking differently than you and take a moment to actually hear what they are saying.

If you love the church like I do, why not get serious and grab hold of the Iron Rod? The joy of the gospel can be found only by embracing and living true principles even when they are unpopular. I ask you to return to the tree of life and taste of that fruit often, and believe me, it is *amazing*. You want some of this.

## Concluding thoughts

Knowing that there is a problem is the first step to addressing it. This is why we are warned not to say that "all is well in Zion"<sup>14</sup> Complacency is the greatest threat to righteousness. We must not despair when we see evidence of apostasy around us, but instead let it motivate us to greater obedience to the commandments of God.

We all err, we are all possessed of the natural man, and our fallen natures lead us to make mistakes. we can use this knowledge in two ways, either we can despair in our iniquities and justify our sins, which leads to damnation, or we can repent and enjoy the most precious fruit of the tree of life: redemption through the atonement of Jesus Christ. I hope we will choose the latter.

It is loyalty to principle that must be our standard, not loyalty to the church. If we abdicate our agency to others, even if we are often led right, we fall short of the blessings God has in store for us. Brigham Young taught this principle in these words:

"What a pity it would be if we were led by one man to utter destruction! Are you afraid of this? I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by Him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know,

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<sup>14</sup> 2 Nephi 28:21

by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually. . . .

"Let all persons be fervent in prayer, until they know the things of God for themselves and become certain that they are walking in the path that leads to everlasting life; then will envy, the child of ignorance, vanish, and there will be no disposition in any man to place himself above another; for such a feeling meets no countenance in the order of heaven. Jesus Christ never wanted to be different from his father: they were and are one. If a people are led by the revelations of Jesus Christ, and they are cognizant of the fact through their faithfulness, there is no fear but they will be one in Christ Jesus, and see eye to eye."<sup>15</sup>

As we strive to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, and simultaneously struggle to navigate the subculture of the church, it can be difficult to overcome the cognitive dissonance between the teachings of the prophets in the scriptures and some of the statements of current leaders. I exhort you not to lose faith in the gospel; Jesus Christ knows your name and your heart, if you strive to serve him he will lead you home. There will come a time, or perhaps that time has already come, in your life when you face a crisis of faith. I hope when faced with this crisis you will remember who it is that is the only sure foundation of your faith: Jesus Christ. As the scriptures teach us: "And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the

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<sup>15</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 9, p. 150, 12 January 1862

gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall."<sup>16</sup>

To build your testimony on others, even on the president of the church, is to build on the sand. But the rock of your redeemer will never fail you. If you need help navigating the waves and winds of doctrine, I hope that you will contact us before you lose faith. Give the Spirit the chance to renew your faith, and he will not disappoint you.

In these struggles God has not left us without direction. Each of us has the scriptures before us, We must read them with our eyes open, searching for guidance in the way we live our lives. We must obtain the spirit to guide us, and once we have it we will know what it is God requires of us.

In our day a final gathering of Israel has begun. Saints are now being called out of Babylon in preparation for the establishment of the New Jerusalem. I exhort you to pray fervently to know if you and your family are called to be a part of this gathering. If you are one of those rare souls who is wholly committed to obeying all of Heavenly Father's commandments, regardless of the consequences, I invite you to contact us by the number listed on the back of this booklet. Come and gather with us in building Zion communities where the united order is being established. Come and partake of the gifts of the spirit and drink of the living waters of revelation that are now flowing upon the heads of the saints in this final gathering of Israel. Come into one of the temples of God where all of the original ordinances have been preserved, and receive all that the Father has. There is no greater blessing than exaltation, and you are invited to come and partake.

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<sup>16</sup> Helaman 5:12

May we all have the courage to stand for what is right, even when it is unpopular is my fervent prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

In this little booklet we hope you will find greater understanding by learning of the distinction between the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ and the apostasy that is the common lot of all men who change the ordinances and doctrines of God. This is a distinction of vital importance for us to have a proper understanding of God's plan for us. We hope that these words will help you to dispel confusion and develop faith in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Have you ever desired to live the fullness of the gospel? Do you look forward to building the city of the New Jerusalem? If so we invite you to gather with us and establish Zion. If you have a desire to serve God, then I exhort you to pray fervently to know if this gathering, preparatory to the establishment of the New Jerusalem, is the place God wants you and your family to gather and labor for his kingdom.

For further information visit

**[www.ChristsChurchTheBranch.org](http://www.ChristsChurchTheBranch.org)**

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