

## 247.1: Apostasy (D&C Gospel Doctrine Lesson 24, Updated)

### “Be Not Deceived, but Continue in Steadfastness”

Manual Goal: To help class members understand how they can avoid deception and apostasy. (an example of the “to help class members do the title”)

EGD Goal: To help class members nurture their relationships to themselves, God, and the Church, and understand how to protect their faith while lovingly relating to those with different beliefs.

#### Outline

- I. Framing
- II. Discussion of new resources
- III. Productive Sunday Schooling
  - a. What is apostasy?
  - b. What is the difference between sinning and apostasy?
  - c. Integrity and loyalty (To self, to God, to the Church)
  - d. Our relationship with each other
  - e. Our relationship with other religions
    - i. Discussion: The not-so-great-apostasy
  - f. Lessons from Jesus (Self righteous and assured vs. those with their heart in the right place)
- IV. Lesson: Standing Together and Standing Apart
  - a. Being an individual in a group
    - i. Why community matters
    - ii. Why integrity matters
    - iii. How the two go together (tension, status and reward, similar to challenge and challenged by, negotiate your space and power)
  - b. Apostasy from what? Relationship to Self, God, Church, Religion
    - i. Where I stand
  - c. Apostasy and Church policy
  - d. Understanding “the Great Apostasy”
- V. Overview of full episode
- VI. Conclusion: Identity and boundaries are important. We *should* protect our values and faith. The gospel also requires us to understand and practice how to balance boundaries relating to our needs and the commandment to love even, perhaps especially, those who challenge us.

## Framing

“Apostate” is not a nice word. Apostasy is used as both a wall and weapon. It means “I am right and you are wrong.” The idea of “the Great Apostasy” serves to communicate that Mormonism is the only true form of Christianity, the only true Church, the only true religion. The word “apostate” exiles someone, pushes them beyond the community, and even worse, suggests that they are not only a sinner, but a traitor. An apostate is an enemy of the Church and an enemy to God.

I believe in apostasy. I believe that we can be enemies to the Church in a way that it is in the best interests of everyone to draw boundaries and put some people on the outside. At the same time, I believe that more often than not, apostate is used as an insult informed by ignorance and fear rather than loving boundary making.

First, let’s talk about why apostasy and apostates are dangerous. Difference is dangerous because it transforms. Familiarity feels safe and provides us the structure to move through our lives efficiently. Most of our instincts, physical and social, are designed to manage the unfamiliar, which could be dangerous. We are wired to be wary of the new and different, because it could threaten us. No matter what, even good things that are new and different DO threaten our current version of ourselves (think about the idea of eating in a different way, even if it is healthier).

In brief, this topic requires careful engagement, because we are wired to have strong feelings around it.

## Discussion of new resources

### [Lesson 24: “Be Not Deceived, but Continue in Steadfastness”](#)

- [“All Things Must Be Done in Order”](#): This article gives context for the revelations included in Doctrine and Covenants 28 and 43. Not sure how to do justice to the messy balance of personal vs. institutional revelation (though Elder Oaks’ summary remains my favorite, that General Authorities give general counsel and God will tell individuals if they are an exception. This article tells about some challenges to Joseph’s authority, but doesn’t really engage the theological issues.
- [“The Faith and Fall of Thomas Marsh”](#): This article gives context for the revelations now found in Doctrine and Covenants 31 and 112. Good background on an important early Church leader that we summarize unfairly. The way we talk about Marsh in the Church is misleading and irresponsible. This article is challenging resource worth engaging. I’m curious about this wording: “Within a few months, Marsh fell prey to a spirit of apostasy, as had many others. He was among several Latter-day Saints who became disturbed by the increasingly violent relationship between Church members and their Missouri neighbors.” Seems like a very valid concern! Why the emphasis on the “milk strippings” incident? Aren’t the violent Mormons the “apostates”?

The history of Thomas Marsh: <https://bycommonconsent.com/2009/07/01/the-milk-strippings-story-thomas-b-marsh-and-brigham-young/>

As Marsh explained in his October 24, 1838, [affidavit](#), he left because he was alarmed that his fellow coreligionists had formed mobs, expelled all the non-Mormons from Daviess County, stolen their property, and burned their homes and towns to the ground.

“Sometime in the fall of 1838, Marsh left Far West with his family and began actively opposing the Saints. He swore out an affidavit in October 1838 that detailed his concerns about acts of violence and destruction he believed were being planned or carried out by members of the Church against their neighbors in Caldwell and Daviess Counties. The affidavit also stated his fear that “all the Mormons who refused to take up arms, if necessary in difficulties with the citizens, should be shot or otherwise put to death” and that “no Mormon dissenter should leave Caldwell county alive.”<sup>19</sup> Orson Hyde added his signature in support of Marsh’s statements.

Although Marsh’s affidavit was just one piece of evidence against the Saints presented to Missouri officials, George A. Smith later declared, “That affidavit brought from the government of Missouri an extermination order, which drove some 15,000 Saints from their homes and habitations, and some thousands perished through suffering the exposure consequent on this state of affairs.” **Tragic example of the cycle of violence. I think we need to condemn wrongdoing, lament tragedy, accept responsibility, and enact meaningful change.** The way we tell history matters, because it impacts the way we understand ourselves and treat others (and frame moral issues generally).

- [“Ezra Booth and Isaac Morley”](#): This article contrasts the different ways in which two early missionaries dealt with their unmet expectations and disappointment following their first trip to Missouri.

I appreciate this careful wording: “When would the Lamanites—then believed to be the North American Indians—be converted and join Church members in building a New Jerusalem in the Americas? These early members knew the site for the city would be “among the Lamanites.”

Joseph Smith himself might have been disappointed initially when he arrived in Missouri. The area around Independence was mostly open prairie with a few scattered trees. Far from inspiring visions of a millennial capital, the frontier town itself was “a century behind the times.”<sup>10</sup> For most of the elders, the reality on the ground in Missouri was a disappointment. But they would deal with that disappointment in different ways. **I’m glad that these resources humanize the leaders of the Church, providing historical context, helping us better understand their beliefs and experiences and motivations.**

The story of Ezra Booth does seem to be a more straightforward tale of someone who joined the Church, was disappointed and upset, and then opposed the Church. Isaac Morley was asked to sacrifice a great deal. These stories are complex, as life is inescapably complex.

## Productive Sunday Schooling

**What is apostasy?** Not being “on the Church’s team” (which I think is the function of the temple recommend questions, by the way, asking “Are you worthy?” and “Are you one of us/on our team?”)

**What is the difference between sinning and apostasy?** (We all sin, but should be repentant. That’s the whole point... not to be perfect, but to realize the way we sin, our tendency to sin, and always have a repentant attitude that keeps us in right relationship to self, each other, and God. Apostasy is damning because we set ourselves against our better selves, against each other, against the Church, against God. The Greek word behind Apostasy means “to stand apart” but the meaning of our word is perhaps better defined as “to stand against” or even “fight against”).

### **Integrity and loyalty (To self, to God, to the Church)**

**Our relationship with each other**

**Our relationship with other religions**

**Discussion: The not-so-great-apostasy**

**Lessons from Jesus (Self righteous and assured vs. those with their heart in the right place)**

## **Lesson: Standing Together and Standing Apart**

**Being an individual in a group** There is inescapable tension and tradeoffs for social creatures. We want to get our own needs and wants met, but we also need to be good members of the community, which brings its own benefits such as identity and status. We as humans thrive \*primarily\*, even exclusively, as members of groups.

### **Why community matters**

**Why integrity matters** We all make acceptable tradeoffs in relationships, but we also need to remain accountable to ourselves. We need to feel ok about the sacrifices and tradeoffs we make. This is why it is unethical to coerce, force, trap. When we are pushed beyond our values, our sense of self and our wellbeing suffers.

**How the two go together (tension, status and reward, similar to challenge and challenged by, negotiate your space and power)** Use the analogy of military desertion. The deserter leaving can be defensible, even best, but for the sake of the institution it can never condone desertion. Acquiring leave or quitting the army needs to be carefully regulated because of the high stakes.

It is also worth reminding ourselves that we are hardwired to defend our groups against perceived outsiders. This is one reason we love sports so much. Or any competition. Being a good member of “us” against “them” has ensured human survival (as well as fueling countless atrocities). An important part of challenging the “natural human” is to challenge this tendency, which was a key message of Jesus’ ministry.

## **Apostasy from what? Relationship to Self, God, Church, Religion**

### **Apostasy and Church policy**

#### **When a Disciplinary Council May Be Necessary**

##### **Serious Transgression**

... It includes (but is not limited to) attempted murder, forcible rape, sexual abuse, spouse abuse, intentional serious physical injury of others, adultery, fornication, homosexual relations (especially sexual cohabitation), deliberate abandonment of family responsibilities, . . .

➤ Handbook 1, number 6.7.3 is also to be updated immediately as follows (addition is highlighted):

#### **When a Disciplinary Council is Mandatory**

##### **Apostasy**

As used here, *apostasy* refers to members who:

1. Repeatedly act in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders.
  2. Persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishop or a higher authority.
  3. Continue to follow the teachings of apostate sects (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishop or a higher authority.
  4. Are in a same-gender marriage.
  5. Formally join another church and advocate its teachings.
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## **Understanding “the Great Apostasy”**

Quotes about the “Dark Ages”

John Taylor: “I have a great many misgivings about the intelligence that men boast so much of in this enlightened day. There were men in those dark ages who could commune with God, and who, by the power of faith, could draw aside the curtain of eternity and gaze upon the invisible world[,] . . . have the ministering of angels, and unfold the future destinies of the world. If those were dark ages I pray God to give me a little darkness, and deliver me from the light and intelligence that prevail in our day.”

Author: John Taylor, Source: Journal of Discourses 16:197

Recommend the book “Standing Apart”

Review: <https://bycommonconsent.com/2014/07/21/standing-apart/>

Miranda Wilcox, prof and BYU: “Latter-day Saints have a paradoxical relationship to the past; even as we invest our own history with sacred meaning—as the restoration of ancient truths and the fulfillment of biblical prophecies—we repudiate the eighteen centuries preceding the founding of our church as apostate distortions of the truth. Constructing a boundary between apostasy and restoration has generated a powerful and enduring binary of categorization in Mormonism that has profoundly impacted our self-perception and relations with other religious communities. *Standing Apart* probes how apostasy functions as a category of alterity in the development of Mormon historical consciousness and the construction of Mormon narrative identity. The contributors trace the development of and changes in Latter-day Saint narratives of apostasy within the context of Mormon history and American Protestant historiography. They offer suggestions and alternate ways that these narratives might be reformulated to engage with the past in generous and charitable conversation, recognizing mutual concerns stemming from shared divine inheritance and humanity while offering new models of interfaith relations, as the LDS Church and Mormon culture respond to challenges and opportunities in the twenty-first century.”

Apostasy that never was:

### **Overview of full episode**

The lesson and discussion will address the following topics:

- The role of the label “apostate” in navigating group boundaries
- How our gifts and strengths as well as weaknesses risk leading us into apostasy
- How *can* we discern truth from error, especially in spiritual contexts?
- Discuss integrity, both in the sense of honesty (not claiming to be what you aren’t) and in the deeper sense of being true to your best self
- The relationship between questioning, doubt, and apostasy
- The relationship between leaving the Church and leaving God and gospel
- The broader context of young people leaving religion and what we can learn from those trends
- The need to love and respect those on different paths and how to do so

**Conclusion:** Identity and boundaries are important. We *should* protect our values and faith. The gospel also requires us to understand and practice how to balance boundaries relating to our needs and the commandment to love even, perhaps especially, those who challenge us.