
APOSTATE

Members of the Church vary in their levels of participation or belief (*see* **ACTIVITY IN THE CHURCH**). Latter-day Saints who have seriously contravened or ignored cardinal Church teachings (publicly or privately) are considered apostates, whether or not they have officially left the Church or affiliated with another religion. By not participating in Church meetings one is not considered apostate. However, when individuals ask to have their names removed from Church records, policy requires such requests to be honored. A Church **DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE** may be held for any member who violates important commandments and “will not repent” (Mosiah 26:32; D&C 42:28). Open repudiation of the Church, its leaders, and teachings is one ground for excommunication.

The steps to apostasy are usually gradual. All members are counseled to guard against all manifestations of personal apostasy (*DS* 3:293–312; Asay, pp. 67–68). The most frequent causes of apostasy are failure to maintain strict standards of morality, taking personal offense (real or perceived), marrying someone who is of another faith or who is irreligious, neglecting to pray and maintain spirituality, or misunderstanding of the teachings of the Church.

Apostasy may be accelerated by a faulty assumption that scripture or Church leaders are infallible. Joseph SMITH taught that “a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such” (*HC* 5:265). He also declared he “was but a man, and [people] must not expect me to be perfect” (*HC* 5:181). Neither the Church nor its leaders and members claim infallibility.

Above all, the Church affirms that its members should seek personal revelation to know the truth and live in tune with the spirit of God. Those who have not done this may drop by the wayside when their faith is challenged or when difficulties arise.

Apostates sometimes become enemies of the Church. Leaving the Church, which claims to be God’s official church, containing the fulness of the gospel, often results in feelings of guilt. While many return, others develop a need to defend their actions, “disprove” the Church, or become hostile enemies. The fruits of apostasy are generally bitter. The Book of Mormon warns of unfavorable conditions that result from transgression contrary to “light and knowledge” (Alma 9:23).

LDS scriptures establish a loving and hopeful attitude toward apostates. Latter-day Saints are strongly counseled to love those who have left the faith, and to encourage, plead, and work with those who have strayed, inviting “the lost sheep” back to the fold (Luke 15:3–7). Of the wayward, the resurrected Savior taught, “Ye shall not cast him out of your . . . places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them” (3 Ne. 18:32). The desire to return is motivated by the reality of **REPENTANCE** enabled by the **ATONEMENT** of Jesus Christ. “He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42–43).

[*See also* Anti-Mormon Publications; Schismatic Groups.]

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APOSTLE

An “apostle” is an ordained leader in the **MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD** in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Apostles are chosen through inspiration by the **PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH**, sustained by the general membership of the Church, and ordained by the **FIRST PRESIDENCY** and the **QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES** by the laying on of hands. They serve as **GENERAL AUTHORITIES**—as distinguished from local and regional officers—holding their office as apostle for the duration of their lives. The senior apostle is the President of the Church.

In addition to serving as witnesses of Jesus Christ to all the world (D&C 107:23), as Jesus’ apostles did, members of the current Quorum of