



We need to be concerned and watchful in order to avoid the mists of darkness that can lead to personal apostasy.

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Of the Seventy

Some years ago I presided over a disciplinary council in which a Melchizedek Priesthood holder was excommunicated from the Church. After some time had passed, I presided over another council, but this time it was a joyful experience because that brother's blessings were being restored. He had repented and for a year had prepared himself to receive authorization to be rebaptized and reconfirmed a member of the Church. After receiving these ordinances, this dear brother wrote me the following:

“Dear President:

“This is the first day of the rest of my life.

That is not a trite phrase; it is how I feel.

Yesterday I received the ordinance of baptism, and I can assure you that I feel like a new man. I feel that a miracle has occurred in me, that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ became effective in me. Today I can say I feel free from the oppression of sin. I know I would not have made it alone. Help from my leaders and from my wife kept me focused on the goal. Today I can say more strongly than ever that Christ is my Savior, that the miracle of forgiveness exists, that the priesthood is the power of God, and that His leaders are inspired.

“With much love, your brother.”

What a difference between this scenario and that of those who do not repent but rather follow the path of apostasy. The gospel reference guidebook *True to the Faith* defines “apostasy” as the act of individuals, the Church, or entire nations falling away from the truth.¹

We need not be concerned about the

AVOIDING PERSONAL APOSTASY





possibility of another apostasy of the Church of Jesus Christ. We have the privilege of living in the dispensation of the fulness of times. This gospel dispensation, which began with the Prophet Joseph Smith, is the last one before the Second Coming of the Savior. However, we need to be concerned and watchful that we do not fall into *personal* apostasy, which can result from several causes. I will mention only a few.

Apostasy frequently results when a person commits serious sin but does not repent. To silence his conscience or justify his sinful actions, the individual moves away from the truth, looking for imperfections in others or questioning Church doctrine with which he no longer agrees.

Conflicts between Church members can also lead to apostasy. Some individuals begin to think the Church is not true when they feel that a leader did not treat them well. They become offended and, without considering what they are losing, they stray from the Church.

A man I have known since childhood was offended by a certain procedure instituted by a Church leader. Afterward, the leader went to visit him several times to ask forgiveness for the offense. Though the procedure was neither ill-intentioned nor incorrect, the man became less active, along with his family. He said he would not return to Church until that leader was released from his calling. Unfortunately, the offended individual never returned, even after the leader was released.

Faultfinding can be another source of personal apostasy. When we look for faults in others or begin to think we could make better decisions than our leaders, we should remember the experience of Oliver Cowdery, the second elder of the Church.

In Doctrine and Covenants 28:2 Oliver Cowdery is told through revelation given to Joseph Smith, “No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun.” In time, sadly, Oliver rebelled against Joseph, saying, “If I leave this church, it will fall.” Joseph responded, “Oliver, you try it.” Oliver did try it, and he fell. The kingdom of God, however, remained firm.²

We enter a state of apostasy when we assume authority we do not possess or when we seek revelation for a stewardship outside of our sphere of responsibility. Our duty, as revealed to Oliver Cowdery, is to “be obedient unto the things” (D&C 28:3) the Lord reveals to His prophet and to our other leaders called through priesthood authority.

When Lehi received the vision of the tree of life, he saw that “there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wan-

dered off and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:23).

I testify that we can avoid the mists of darkness that lead to personal apostasy by repenting of our sins, overcoming offense, eliminating faultfinding, and following our Church leaders. We can also avoid those mists by humbling ourselves, forgiving others, keeping our covenants, partaking of the sacrament worthily each week, and strengthening our testimonies through prayer, daily scripture study, temple attendance where possible, magnifying our Church callings, and serving our fellowmen. ■

NOTES

1. *True to the Faith* (2004), 13.
2. In Spencer W. Kimball, “To Bear the Priesthood Worthily,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 78.

LEHI'S DREAM OF THE TREE OF LIFE BY ADRIAN VON SUCHTELEN

