

Elder Theodore M. Burton

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

A charge has been given me today to teach the people. What people shall I teach? To teach, I must narrow both subject and class to fit a specific need. Specifically, then, I limit my remarks to the priesthood leaders called by the First Presidency to this annual conference. But priesthood leaders are changed from time to time under inspiration received from God; hence, all brethren receiving the priesthood may prepare themselves for leadership by applying my remarks to themselves.

Since we men need encouragement and assistance from our wives in the performance of our assigned priesthood duties, the sisters should understand the nature of priesthood responsibility and become as Mother Eve, "an help meet" for the man. By the word "meet" is meant a person who is worthy, or of the same ability, quality, and status.

Key of administration to quorum officers

Presidents of every priesthood quorum in the Church of Jesus Christ receive keys of administration for that quorum by which they are authorized to preside over the members thereof. Beginning with the deacons' president and repeated for the president of every quorum, presidents are instructed to sit in council with quorum members, to "teach them their duty, edifying one another, as is given according to the covenants." (D&C 107:85-89.)

A priesthood leader's responsibility, then, is personally to watch over an assigned segment of the Church. "The teacher's duty is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them;

"And see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking;

"And see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty." (D&C 20:53-55.)

This duty to teach and counsel applies even more specifically to those

who are chosen to preside over a quorum of the sons of God who hold the powers of the priesthood.

Limiting my remarks to priesthood leaders requires a limit also to the subject to be taught. When the Apostle John wrote to the saints, he urged them to come out of the darkness of sin into the true light of Jesus Christ. By righteous living they were to qualify themselves to receive added spiritual blessings. He reminded those who had so qualified themselves:

"But ye have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and ye know all things [concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ]." (1 John 2:20.) And, he continued:

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (1 John 2:27.)

We have been told that oil is the sacred symbol of the spirit's operations. This anointing spoken of by John is an actual anointing with oil, which shall teach people the divinity of Jesus Christ and how to live more righteously. Paul referred to this anointing as he wrote:

"Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God;

"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (2 Cor. 1:21-22.)

Where can such anointings and gifts of the Spirit be obtained? The Lord has revealed it to us in these words:

"For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle, that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid [from the unworthy] from before the world was.

"Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead,

and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipalities, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name." (D&C 124:38-39.)

Such a house of God, called a temple, is defined as: ". . . a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God." (D&C 88:119.)

The value, therefore, of having members of the Church qualify themselves by righteous living to receive such great spiritual blessings in the temple of God is obvious.

Training quorum members

One of the duties of priesthood leaders is to teach, counsel, and train the members of their quorums and their wives and families, so that they will live worthily enough to be able to receive permission to go into the House of the Lord to receive these ordinances and blessings that lead to family exaltation. In addition, they should be encouraged and counseled to return often to the temple for the spiritual uplift such temple attendance will give those who attend. This, then, requires genealogical activity to identify our kindred dead for whom we can then perform those temple ordinances that will open the doors of exaltation for them also. Each time we return to the temple to do such ordinance work for others, we receive a renewal of that spiritual strengthening which brings us personally closer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Checking spiritual growth

In checking on the spiritual growth of members of his quorum through attendance at the temple, the priesthood leader is faced with the same problem as in checking on the payment of tithes and offerings, which is a necessary preparation for any spiritual service in

a member of his priesthood quorum makes tithing payments. It is not necessary to know how much tithing the member pays, but only to be assured that he is a full tithe payer. If he is, the priesthood leader can express appreciation for his faith and devotion, and the leader can then concentrate his encouragement and teaching on those who need help in understanding this principle and the values of obedience to God.

Temple attendance

the kingdom of God. It is not necessary to know how many times a month

So in checking on temple attendance, it is important to know that each member of the quorum and his wife understand the principles involved and attend the temple regularly. It is not necessary to know how many times a month the member and his wife have been to the temple, any more than the leader needs to know how much tithing has been paid. His only interest is to know that each man for whom he is personally responsible to the Lord has taken advantage of every spiritual blessing to which that member and his wife are entitled by reason of their faith and righteous living. By patient teaching and continual encouragement the leader can cleanse himself of the blood of responsibility for that individual, as explained by Ezekiel:

"So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

"When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

"Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." (Ezek. 33:7-9.)

By wickedness, I mean in this instance those who are slothful in taking advantage of opportunities that God has provided for them. This is what the Lord himself said to the Prophet Joseph Smith, when he stated:

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“ . . . by this you may know they are under the bondage of sin, because they come not unto me.

“For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin.” (D&C 84:50-51.) By warning, I mean teaching in meekness and in mildness the advantages of obedience.

How to foster activity

To fill this teaching requirement, the priesthood leader can obtain from the bishop the names of quorum members and their wives who have received a recommendation to attend the temple to perform temple ordinances. To these he can address a simple inquiry in private: “Have you and your wife been to the temple during the past month?” To those who have attended the temple, the priesthood leader can express his appreciation and give them a word of commendation for their offering to the Lord in righteousness.

The leader need neither chide nor rebuke those who failed to take advantage of this glorious opportunity but should encourage them to go to the temple during the current month for the spiritual uplift it will bring. It alerts the leader to the need of checking again at the end of the month to see if that member has caught the vision of this work. If the member and his wife have not gone to the temple by then, the leader knows that the process of teaching and motivation must begin again, and with the help of the home teachers he can begin a program of patient encouragement and teaching that will bring spiritual growth back into their lives.

Teaching to qualify members

The major effort must be placed by priesthood leaders and home teachers in a program of teaching that will qualify those not worthy to receive a temple recommendation. Such persons must be taught how to modify their lives so they can find that happiness and joy for which reason man was placed upon the earth to learn.

If we are charged with watching over the Church, the question must remain continually before our eyes: “Have we taught our members unselfishness and service? Are they will-

ing to assist others, both those living and those dead, to come unto Jesus and receive this anointing of God by which they may receive that grace provided for by the atoning sacrifice of our Lord?”

I am reminded of the words of the Book of Mormon, which is an additional witness for the divinity of Jesus Christ:

“For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Ne. 25:23.)

So to priesthood leaders I can say: “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence. “He that is slothful shall not be counted worthy to stand, and he that learns not his duty and shows himself not approved shall not be counted worthy to stand.” (D&C 107:99-100.)

In this one thing, then, I urge leaders of the priesthood quorums to take positive action and to realize that no report form, no filled-out slip, no written word can ever take the place of a kind and patient teacher. This teacher loves those he teaches and gives them the warmth of his personal attention, as our Lord gives us through his chosen prophets and apostles, who, I testify by personal knowledge, are men of God.

I testify that God does live, that Jesus is divine, that he rose from the dead and is our living advocate before the Father. I pledge anew my love for Jesus Christ, whom I humbly acknowledge as my Lord and King.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith

Elder Theodore M. Burton, Assistant to the Twelve, has just addressed us.

Elder ElRay L. Christiansen, Assistant to the Twelve, will be our concluding speaker this afternoon.

The Saturday morning session will be broadcast direct by numerous radio and television stations, and recorded for transmission on Sunday morning to many television stations in the Eastern and Central parts of the United States.