

"The Priesthood of Our Lord." The benediction will be pronounced by

Elder Waldo P. Call of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

## President Ezra Taft Benson

### Privilege and responsibility of holding the priesthood

My beloved brethren: This night, as I look out over this great body of priesthood holders and think of the similar congregations throughout the world, I am stirred with a great sense of gratitude and joy for the blessings our Heavenly Father has given us.

The privilege of holding the priesthood, which is the power and authority to act in God's name, is a great blessing and privilege and one that carries with it equally great obligations and responsibilities. When I ponder what kind of men and boys we should be as priesthood holders, I cannot help but think of the Savior's questions to the Nephite twelve when He asked, "Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

### Our charge to be like the Savior

To be like the Savior—what a challenge for any person! He is a member of the Godhead. He is the Savior and Redeemer. He was perfect in every aspect of His life. There was no flaw nor failing in Him. Is it possible for us as priesthood holders to be even as He is? The answer is yes. Not only *can* we, but that is our charge, our responsibility. He would not give us that commandment if He did not mean for us to do it.

The Apostle Peter spoke of the process by which a person can be made a partaker "of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). This is important, for if we truly become partakers of the divine nature, we shall become like Him. Let us examine closely what Peter teaches

us about this process. Here is what he said:

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

"And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

"And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The virtues outlined by Peter are part of the divine nature, or the Savior's character. These are the virtues we are to emulate if we would be more like Him. Let us discuss a few of these important traits.

### Faith — the foundation for building a godlike character

The first characteristic, to which all the others are added, is *faith*. Faith is the foundation upon which a godlike character is built. It is a prerequisite for all other virtues.

When I think of how we show faith, I cannot help but think of the example of my own father. I recall vividly how the spirit of missionary work came into my life. I was about thirteen years of age when my father received a call to go on a mission. It was during an epidemic in our little community of Whitney, Idaho. Parents were encouraged to go to sacrament meeting, but the children were to remain home to avoid contracting the disease.

Father and Mother went to sacrament meeting in a one-horse buggy. At the close of the meeting, the storekeeper opened the store just long enough for the farmers to get their mail, since the post office was in the store. There were no purchases, but in this way the farmers saved a trip to the post

office on Monday. There was no rural postal delivery in those days.

As Father drove the horse homeward, Mother opened the mail, and, to their surprise, there was a letter from Box B in Salt Lake City — a call to go on a mission. No one asked if one were ready, willing, or able. The bishop was supposed to know, and the bishop was Grandfather George T. Benson, my father's father.

As Father and Mother drove into the yard, they were both crying — something we had never seen in our family. We gathered around the buggy — there were seven of us then — and asked them what was the matter.

They said, "Everything's fine."

"Why are you crying then?" we asked.

"Come into the living room and we'll explain."

We gathered around the old sofa in the living room, and Father told us about his mission call. Then Mother said: "We're proud to know that Father is considered worthy to go on a mission. We're crying a bit because it means two years of separation. You know, your father and I have never been separated more than two nights at a time since our marriage — and that's when Father was gone into the canyon to get logs, posts, and firewood."

And so Father went on his mission. Though at the time I did not fully comprehend the depths of my father's commitment, I understand better now that his willing acceptance of this call was evidence of his great faith. Every holder of the priesthood, whether young or old, should strive to develop that kind of faith.

### **Virtue — akin to holiness**

Peter goes on to say that we must add to our faith *virtue*. A priesthood holder is *virtuous*. Virtuous behavior implies that he has pure thoughts and clean actions. He will not lust in his heart, for to do so is to "deny the faith" and to lose the Spirit (D&C 42:23) — and there is nothing more important in

this work than the Spirit. You've heard me say that many times.

He will not commit adultery "nor do anything like unto it" (D&C 59:6). This means fornication, homosexual behavior, self-abuse, child molestation, or any other sexual perversion. This means that a young man will honor young women and treat them with respect. He would never do anything that would deprive them of that which, in Mormon's words, is "most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue" (Moroni 9:9).

Virtue is akin to holiness, an attribute of godliness. A priesthood holder should actively seek for that which is virtuous and lovely and not that which is debasing or sordid. Virtue will garnish his thoughts unceasingly (see D&C 121:45). How can any man indulge himself in the evils of pornography, profanity, or vulgarity and consider himself totally virtuous?

Whenever a priesthood holder departs from the path of virtue in any form or expression, he loses the Spirit and comes under Satan's power. He then receives the wages of him whom he has chosen to serve. As a result, sometimes the Church must take disciplinary action, for we cannot condone or pardon unvirtuous and unrepentant actions. All priesthood holders must be morally clean to be worthy to bear the authority of Jesus Christ.

### **Knowledge — balance spiritual and secular learning**

The next step Peter describes in the growth process is to add *knowledge* to our faith and virtue. The Lord has told us that "it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance" (D&C 131:6). In another place God commanded, "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). Every priesthood holder should make learning a lifetime pursuit. While any study of truth is of value, the truths of salvation are the most important truths any person can learn. The Lord's question, "For what is a man profited, if

he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26) can be applied to educational pursuits as well as the pursuit of worldly goods. The Lord might also have asked, "For what is a man profited, if he shall learn everything in the world and not learn how to be saved?"

We must balance our secular learning with spiritual learning. You young men should be as earnest in enrolling in seminary and learning the scriptures as you are in working toward high school graduation. Young adults enrolled in universities and colleges or other postsecondary training should avail themselves of the opportunity to take institute of religion courses or, if attending a Church school, should take at least one religion course every term. Joining our spiritual education to our secular learning will help us keep focused on the things that matter most in this life. Though I am speaking to you priesthood holders, the same admonition applies to the women of the Church as well as to the men.

### **Spiritual learning must take first place**

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., spoke of the desired balance in these words: "There is spiritual learning just as there is material learning, and the one without the other is not complete; yet, speaking for myself, if I could have only one sort of learning, that which I would take would be the learning of the spirit, because in the hereafter I shall have opportunity in the eternities which are to come to get the other, and without spiritual learning here my handicaps in the hereafter would be all but overwhelming" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1934, p. 94).

President Spencer W. Kimball said it this way: "Youth, beloved youth, can you see why we must let spiritual training take first place?—Why we must pray with faith, and perfect our own lives like the Savior's? Can you see that the spiritual knowledge may be complemented with the

secular in this life and on for eternities but that the secular without the foundation of the spiritual is but like the foam upon the milk, the fleeting shadow?

"Do not be deceived! One need not choose between the two but only as to the sequence, for there is opportunity for one to get both simultaneously; but can you see that the seminary courses should be given even preferential attention over the high school subjects; the institute over the college course; the study of the scriptures ahead of the study of man-written texts; the association with the Church more important than clubs, fraternities, and sororities; the payment of tithing more important than paying tuitions and fees?

"Can you see that the ordinances of the temple are more important than the PhD or any and all other academic degrees?" ("Beloved Youth, Study and Learn," in *Life's Directions: A Series of Fireside Addresses* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1962], p. 190).

When our formal education has been completed, we should make daily study of the scriptures a lifetime pursuit. What I said last April to priesthood leaders applies to every priesthood holder as well:

"I add my voice to these wise and inspired brethren and say to you that one of the most important things you can do as priesthood leaders is to immerse yourselves in the scriptures. Search them diligently. Feast upon the words of Christ. Learn the doctrine. Master the principles that are found therein. . . . Few other efforts . . . will bring greater dividends to your calling. . . . Few other ways [will result in] greater inspiration. . . .

"You must . . . see that studying and searching the scriptures is not a burden laid upon [us] by the Lord, but a marvelous blessing and opportunity" ("The Power of the Word," *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 81).

### **Temperance — have self-control**

Another attribute described by Peter as being part of the divine nature

is *temperance*. A priesthood holder is *temperate*. This means he is restrained in his emotions and verbal expressions. He does things in moderation and is not given to overindulgence. In a word, he has self-control. He is the master of his emotions, not the other way around.

A priesthood holder who would curse his wife, abuse her with words or actions, or do the same to one of his own children is guilty of grievous sin. "Can ye be angry, and not sin?" asked the Apostle Paul (JST, Ephesians 4:26).

If a man does not control his temper, it is a sad admission that he is not in control of his thoughts. He then becomes a victim of his own passions and emotions, which lead him to actions that are totally unfit for civilized behavior, let alone behavior for a priesthood holder.

President David O. McKay once said, "A man who cannot control his temper is not very likely to control his passion, and no matter what his pretensions in religion, he moves in daily life very close to the animal plane" (*Improvement Era*, June 1958, p. 407).

### **Patience — be understanding and learn to wait on the Lord**

To our temperance we are to add *patience*. A priesthood holder is to be *patient*. Patience is another form of self-control. It is the ability to postpone gratification and to bridle one's passions. In his relationships with loved ones, a patient man does not engage in impetuous behavior that he will later regret. Patience is composure under stress. A patient man is understanding of others' faults.

A patient man also waits on the Lord. We sometimes read or hear of people who seek a blessing from the Lord, then grow impatient when it does not come swiftly. Part of the divine nature is to trust in the Lord enough to "be still and know that [he is] God" (D&C 101:16).

A priesthood holder who is patient will be tolerant of the mistakes and failings of his loved ones. Because he

loves them, he will not find fault nor criticize nor blame.

### **Kindness — extend this to all**

Another attribute mentioned by Peter is *kindness*. A priesthood holder is *kind*. One who is kind is sympathetic and gentle with others. He is considerate of others' feelings and courteous in his behavior. He has a helpful nature. Kindness pardons others' weaknesses and faults. Kindness is extended to all — to the aged and the young, to animals, to those low of station as well as the high.

These are the true attributes of the divine nature. Can you see how we become more Christlike as we are more virtuous, more kind, more patient, and more in control of our emotional feelings?

The Apostle Paul used some vivid expressions to illustrate that a member of the Church must be different from the world. He commended us to "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27), "put off . . . the old man," and "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

### **Charity — "the greatest of all"**

The final and crowning virtue of the divine character is *charity*, or the pure love of Christ (see Moroni 7:47). If we would truly seek to be more like our Savior and Master, then learning to love as He loves should be our highest goal. Mormon called charity "the greatest of all" (Moroni 7:46).

The world today speaks a great deal about love, and it is sought for by many. But the pure love of Christ differs greatly from what the world thinks of love. Charity never seeks selfish gratification. The pure love of Christ seeks only the eternal growth and joy of others.

When I think of charity, I again think of my father and that day he was called on his mission. I suppose some in the world might say that his acceptance of that call was proof he did not really love his family. To leave seven

children and an expectant wife at home alone for two years, how could that be true love?

But my father knew a greater vision of love. He knew that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). He knew that the best thing he could do for his family was to obey God.

While we missed him greatly during those years, and while his absence brought many challenges to our family, his acceptance proved to be a gift of charity. Father went on his mission, leaving Mother at home with seven children. (The eighth was born four months after he arrived in the field.) But there came into that home a spirit of missionary work that never left it. It was not without some sacrifice. Father had to sell our old dry farm in order to finance his mission. He had to move a married couple into part of our home to take care of the row crops, and he left his sons and wife the responsibility for the hay land, the pasture land, and a small herd of dairy cows.

Father's letters were indeed a blessing to our family. To us children, they seemed to come from halfway around the world, but they were only from Springfield, Massachusetts; and Chicago, Illinois; and Cedar Rapids and Marshalltown, Iowa. Yes, there came into our home, as a result of Father's mission, a spirit of missionary work that never left it.

Later the family grew to eleven children, seven sons and four daughters. All seven sons filled missions, some of them two or three missions. Later, two daughters and their husbands filled full-time missions. The two other sisters, both widows — one the mother of eight and the other the mother of ten — served as missionary companions in Birmingham, England.

It is a legacy that still continues to bless the Benson family even into the third and fourth generations. Was not this truly a gift of love?

### **"Become partakers of the divine nature"**

This is what the Savior means when He speaks of the kind of men we should be. Does not His own life reflect perfect diligence, perfect faith, perfect virtue? If we are to be like Him, we too must become partakers of the divine nature.

The Savior declared that life eternal is to know the only true God and His Son Jesus Christ (see John 17:3). If this is true, and I bear you my solemn witness that it is true, then we must ask how we come to know God. The process of adding one godly attribute to another, as described by Peter, becomes the key to gaining this knowledge that leads to eternal life. Note Peter's promise, which immediately follows the process described:

"For if these things be in you, *and abound*, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8; italics added).

Oh, my beloved brethren, I pray that these qualities and attributes of the Savior may abound in us so that when we stand at the Judgment and He asks each one of us, "What manner of man are you?" we can raise our heads in gratitude and joy and answer, "Even as thou art." This is my humble prayer for each and every priesthood holder in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **Statement: stake seventies quorums to be discontinued**

Now, brethren, I would like to read to you a statement recently approved by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve:

"In harmony with the needs of the growth of the Church across the world, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles have given prayerful consideration to the role of the stake seventies quorums in the Church and have determined to take the following action relative thereto:

"1. The seventies quorums in the stakes of the Church are to be discontinued, and the brethren now serving as seventies in these quorums will be asked to return to membership in the elders quorums of their wards. Stake presidents, in an orderly fashion, may then determine who among such brethren should be ordained to the office of high priest.

"This change does not affect the First Quorum of the Seventy, members of which are all General Authorities of the Church.

"2. Particular emphasis is to be given in stake missions to cooperating with the full-time proselyting missionaries by finding, friendshiping, fellowshiping, and fostering member participation in all missionary activities. A missionary-minded elder or

high priest will be called as the stake mission president with his counselors being selected from among the elders or high priests.

"Additional detailed instructions regarding this announcement will be provided local priesthood leaders by letter from the First Presidency.

"At this time, we commend all who have served both past and present as members of stake seventies quorums of the Church and who have so ably given of their time, talents, and resources in spreading forth the gospel of Jesus Christ."

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The choir sang "Priesthood of Our Lord."

Elder Waldo P. Call offered the benediction.

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## SECOND DAY MORNING MEETING

### FOURTH SESSION

The fourth session of the 156th Semiannual General Conference commenced at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday, October 5, 1986. President Ezra Taft Benson conducted.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music with Jerold Ottley directing and Robert Cundick at the organ.

Prior to the opening of the session, the choir sang "Arise, O God, and Shine" without announcement.

President Benson made the following remarks:

#### President Ezra Taft Benson

We welcome all who are in attendance for this, the fourth general session of the 156th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We also extend our greeting to all who are seated in the Assembly Hall, where Elders George P. Lee and Rex C.

Reeve are seated on the stand, and to the many others who are participating by radio, television, or cable—with time offered by owners and operators, to whom we are indebted—or by satellite transmission.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic affairs leaders, and officers and members of the Church from many lands who have assembled to worship and to counsel together in this conference.

The Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Brother Jerold Ottley with Brother Robert Cundick at the organ, is providing the music for this session.

The choir opened these services by singing "Arise, O God, and Shine" and will now sing "More Holiness Give Me," following which Elder Robert L. Backman, a member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy, will offer the invocation.