

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The general priesthood session, the third session of the 169th Annual General Conference, convened in the Tabernacle at 6:00 P.M. on Saturday, April 3, 1999. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

Music was provided by a combined men's choir from Brigham Young University. Mack Wilberg and Ronald Staheli directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen was the organist.

President Hinckley opened the meeting with the following remarks.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Brethren, we welcome you to this general priesthood session of the 169th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

These services are being relayed by closed circuit and satellite transmission to holders of the priesthood gathered in the Assembly Hall, the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, the BYU Marriott Center, the Missionary Training Center, and in locations in many countries throughout the world.

The singing during this session will be given by the combined men's choir from BYU under the direction of Mack Wilberg and Ronald Staheli, with Clay Christiansen at the organ.

We will begin this priesthood session with the choir singing "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah." Following the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah."

Elder Neil L. Andersen offered the invocation.

President Hinckley

The choir will now sing "I Know That My Redeemer Lives." Following the singing, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us.

The choir sang "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

Elder Russell M. Nelson

It is a joy to be with you tonight, brethren, and wonderful to see so many young men with their fathers. We are assembled because of our desire to hearken to the leaders of the Church. But this congregation is unique. I don't see any mothers. Not one of us could be here without a mother, yet we are all here—without our mothers.

Tonight I am attending with a son, sons-in-law, and grandsons. Where are their mothers? Gathered in the kitchen of our home! What are they doing? Making

large batches of homemade doughnuts! And when we return home, we will feast on those doughnuts. While we enjoy them, these mothers, sisters, and daughters will listen intently as each of us speaks of things he learned here tonight. It's a nice family tradition, symbolic of the fact that everything we learn and do as priesthood bearers should bless our families.¹

Let us speak about our worthy and wonderful sisters, particularly our mothers, and consider our sacred duty to honor them.

A young man's sin dishonors his mother

When I was a young university student, one of my classmates urgently pleaded with a group of us—his Latter-day Saint friends—to donate blood for his mother, who was bleeding profusely. We went directly to the hospital to have our blood typed and tested. I'll never forget our shock when told that one of the prospective donors was unfit because of a positive blood test for a venereal disease. That infected blood was his own! Fortunately, his mother survived, but I'll never forget his lingering sorrow. He bore the burden of knowing that his personal immorality had disqualified him from giving needed aid to his mother, and he had added to her grief. I learned a great lesson: if one dishonors the commandments of God, one dishonors mother, and if one dishonors mother, one dishonors the commandments of God.²

Honor motherhood

During my professional career as a doctor of medicine, I was occasionally asked why I chose to do that difficult work. I responded with my opinion that the highest and noblest work in this life is that of a mother. Since that option was not available to me, I thought that caring for the sick might come close. I tried to care for my patients as compassionately and competently as Mother cared for me.

Many years ago the First Presidency issued a statement that has had a profound and lasting influence upon me. "Motherhood," they wrote, "is near to divinity. It is the highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind. It places her who honors its holy calling and service next to the angels."³

Because mothers are essential to God's great plan of happiness, their sacred work is opposed by Satan, who would destroy the family and demean the worth of women.

You young men need to know that you can hardly achieve your highest potential without the influence of good women, particularly your mother and, in a few years, a good wife. Learn now to show respect and gratitude. Remember that your mother is your mother. She should not need to issue orders. Her wish, her hope, her hint should provide direction that you would honor. Thank her and express your love for her. And if she is struggling to rear you without your father, you have a double duty to honor her.

A mother's letter saves her child

The influence of your mother will bless you throughout life, especially when you serve as a missionary. Long years ago, Elder Frank Croft was serving in the state of Alabama. While preaching to the people, he was forcefully abducted by a vicious gang, to be whipped and lashed across his bare back. Elder Croft was ordered to remove his coat and shirt before he was tied to a tree. As he did so, a letter he had recently received from his mother fell to the ground. The vile leader of the gang picked up the letter. Elder Croft closed his eyes and uttered a silent prayer. The attacker read the letter from Elder Croft's mother. From a copy of that letter, I quote:

"My beloved son, . . . remember the words of the Savior when He said, . . . 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for you will have your reward in Heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.' Also remember the Savior upon the cross suffering from the sins of the world when He had uttered these immortal words, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Surely, my boy, they who are mistreating you . . . know not what they do or they would not do it. Sometime, somewhere, they will understand

and then they will regret their action and they will honor you for the glorious work you are doing. So be patient, my son, love those who mistreat you and say all manner of evil against you and the Lord will bless you and magnify you. . . . Remember also, my son, that day and night, your mother is praying for you."

Elder Croft watched the hateful man as he studied the letter. He would read a line or two, then sit and ponder. He arose to approach his captive. The man said: "Feller, you must have a wonderful mother. You see, I once had one, too." Then addressing the mob, he said: "Men, after reading this Mormon's mother's letter, I just can't go ahead with the job. Maybe we had better let him go." Elder Croft was released without harm.⁴

We are deeply grateful for the faithful mothers and fathers of our wonderful missionaries. The love they bear for their children is sublime.

Honor your sisters

We who bear the holy priesthood have a sacred duty to honor our sisters. We are old enough and wise enough to know that teasing is wrong. We respect sisters—not only in our immediate families but all the wonderful sisters in our lives. As daughters of God their potential is divine. Without them eternal life would be impossible. Our high regard for them should spring from our love of God and from an awareness of their lofty purpose in His great eternal plan.

Hence, I warn against pornography. It is degrading of women. It is evil. It is infectious, destructive, and addictive. The body has means by which it can cleanse itself from harmful effects of contaminated food or drink. But it cannot vomit back the poison of pornography. Once recorded, it always remains subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind, with power to draw you away from the wholesome things in life. Avoid it like the plague!

Honor your wife

To you who are not yet married, think about your future marriage. Choose your companion well. Remember the scriptures that teach the importance of marriage in the temple:

"In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

"And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage];

"And if he does not, he cannot obtain it."⁵

The highest ordinances in the house of the Lord are received by husband and wife together and equally—or not at all!

In retrospect I see that the most important day of my life was the day when my sweetheart, Dantzel, and I were married in the holy temple. Without her I could not have the highest and most enduring blessings of the priesthood. Without her I would not be the father to our wonderful children or grandfather to our precious grandchildren.

As fathers we should have love unbounded for the mothers of our children. We should accord to them the gratitude, respect, and praise that they deserve. Husbands, to keep alive the spirit of romance in your marriage, be considerate and kind in the tender intimacies of your married life. Let your thoughts and actions inspire confidence and trust. Let your words be wholesome and your time together be uplifting. Let nothing in life take priority over your wife—neither work, recreation, nor hobby.

An ideal marriage is a true partnership between two imperfect people, each striving to complement the other, to keep the commandments, and to do the will of the Lord.

The family is ordained of God

The family is the most important unit of society and of the Church. The family is ordained of God. It is central to

His plan for the eternal destiny of His children.⁶ "God has established families to bring happiness to his children, to allow them to learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and to prepare them for eternal life."⁷

Fathers preside over the family in love

Parents have the primary responsibility for the welfare of their children.⁸ The Church does not replace that parental responsibility. Ideally, the Latter-day Saint family is presided over by a worthy man who holds the priesthood. This patriarchal authority has been honored among the people of God in all dispensations. It is of divine origin, and that union, if sealed by proper authority, will continue throughout eternity. He who is the Father of us all and the source of this authority demands that governance in the home be in love and righteousness.⁹

You fathers can help with the dishes, care for a crying baby, and change a diaper. And perhaps some Sunday you could get the children ready for Church, and your wife could sit in the car and honk.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."¹⁰ With that kind of love, brethren, we will be better husbands and fathers, more loving and spiritual leaders. Happiness at home is most likely to be achieved when practices there are founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ.¹¹ Ours is the responsibility to ensure that we have family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening. Ours is the responsibility to prepare our children to receive the ordinances of salvation and exaltation and the blessings promised to tithe payers. Ours is the privilege to bestow priesthood blessings of healing, comfort, and direction.

The home is the great laboratory of love. There the raw chemicals of selfishness and greed are melded in the crucible of cooperation to yield compassionate concern and love one for another.¹²

Express love to your wife, mother, sisters

Honor the special sisters in your lives, brethren. Express your love to your wife, to your mother, and to the sisters. Praise them for their forbearance with you even when you are not at your best. Thank the Lord for these sisters who—like our Heavenly Father—love us not only for what we are but for what we may become. Humbly I thank God for my mother, my sisters, my daughters, granddaughters, and for my special sweetheart, companion, and friend—my wife!

May God bless us to honor each virtuous woman, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 23:3.
2. Many scriptures teach us to honor our parents. See Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Matthew 15:4; 19:19; Mark 7:10; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Ephesians 6:2; 1 Nephi 17:55; Mosiah 13:20; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 19:19, The Holy Scriptures: Inspired Version; Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 7:12, Bible appendix.
3. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 6:178. In 1935 the First Presidency stated, "The true spirit of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gives to woman the highest place of honor in human life" (in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6:5).
4. See Arthur M. Richardson, *The Life and Ministry of John Morgan* (1965), 267–68.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–3.
6. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
7. *Family Guidebook* (pamphlet, 1992), iv.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–45.
10. Ephesians 5:25.
11. See *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
12. See Mosiah 4:14–15; Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–31.

President Hinckley

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

We will now hear from Elders Ray H. Wood, Ned B. Roueché, and D. Lee Tobler, members of the Seventy.

Elder Ray H. Wood**Disobedience of one affects all**

After the children of Israel had crossed the river Jordan and Jericho had been destroyed, they confronted the city of Ai. Ai was a smaller city than Jericho, with fewer defenders, and Joshua thought to conquer it with only 3,000 soldiers. But the men of Ai smote the force of Israel and put them to flight. Joshua prostrated himself before the Lord and queried the reason for their defeat. Then came the answer—and a lesson.

When Jericho was destroyed, the Lord forbade them from taking any of the precious possessions to be found therein. But one man, Achan, seized and attempted to hide some of the spoils. "When I saw [them]," he said, "I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent" (Joshua 7:21). The Lord commanded them to be destroyed, and Achan was stoned to death.

It may seem difficult for us to understand how the dishonesty of one man could have had such a far-reaching effect to cause the defeat of the army of Israel and the death of 36 men. Elder James E. Talmage observed, "A law of righteousness had been violated, and things that were accursed had been introduced into the camp of the covenant people; this transgression interposed resistance to the current of divine help, and until the people had sanctified themselves the power was not renewed unto them" (*The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. [1924], 105; see also Joshua 7:10–13).

Sin causes loss of Spirit

When a person violates any of God's commandments, if there is no repentance the Lord withdraws His protective and sustaining influence. When we lose power with God, we know of a certainty that the problem lies within us and not within God. "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (D&C 82:10). Our misdeeds bring despair. They sadden and extinguish the "perfect brightness of hope" offered by Christ (2 Nephi 31:20). Without God's help, we are left to ourselves.

Priesthood works only in righteousness

Priesthood is authority to act as an authorized agent of the Lord to perform ordinances which provide certain spiritual blessings to all individuals. It is power to convey the mind and will of God in Church government, in obtaining His word through revelation, in preaching the gospel, and in administering the ordinances of exaltation for both the living and the dead. Truly it is a mighty thing to bear the priesthood of God.

We are told that "the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness" (D&C 121:36). President Spencer W. Kimball reminds us: "There is no limit to the power of the priesthood . . . you hold. The limit comes *in you* if