

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

you do not live in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord and you limit yourselves in the power you exert" (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 498; italics added).

As holders of the priesthood of God, we must remember that we "are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). We are commanded to "come . . . out from the wicked, and be . . . separate, and touch not [the] unclean things" (Alma 5:57).

Magnify, be worthy of the priesthood

When a man, young or old, accepts and receives the priesthood, there comes a sacred responsibility of magnifying that priesthood. This requires each one of us to serve with diligence, to teach with faith and testimony, to lift and strengthen those whose lives we touch. This means that we cannot live only unto ourselves, but we are also responsible for the growth, development, and welfare of others.

There should be nothing automatic about ordination to any office of the priesthood because of age or circumstances. Blessed be the priesthood leader who conscientiously interviews each candidate for priesthood office and receives from that candidate a report of prior honorable service, an affirmation of personal purity and worthiness, and a confirmation of magnified effort and future intent to willingly bear and fulfill the great responsibility of priesthood office.

Priesthood mantle not to be neglected

There should be nothing casual, nonchalant, or indifferent about holding priesthood. Once accepted, it should not be ignored, neglected, or cast aside. It is a mantle of honor and power that may be ours forever.

By accepting a call to priesthood, each man binds himself by his own integrity to act in a certain way. This brings a sense of responsibility, generating in each of us a power of reinforcement for positive action and a deterrent to slothfulness.

For those who take these sacred and holy callings lightly, President George Q. Cannon cautions us: "We must honor the Priesthood we hold or that Priesthood, instead of exalting us, will be the means of damning us. . . . It is a fearful thing to receive the Priesthood of God and not magnify it" (*Gospel Truth*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist, 2 vols. [1957-74], 1:229).

Jesus Christ is the example

As we consider the priesthood, let us not forget its true title: the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the great high priest of God. He is the source of all priesthood authority and power on this earth. As our Savior, Mediator, and Redeemer, He is our great exemplar of the path we are to follow—in word, in deed, in belief, in doctrine, in faith, in ordinances, and in our personal righteousness. "For even hereunto were [we] called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that [we] should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

He has promised us glory, eternal life, exaltation, even all He has, if we faithfully bear His priesthood and magnify all of our callings. We become joint heirs with Him in the kingdom of His Father. The Apostle Paul said it well: "And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God, abiding a priest continually" (Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 7:3).

I bear my solemn witness that it may be so, "relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save" (2 Nephi 31:19), even our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In His sacred name, Jesus Christ, amen.