

The Powers of the Priesthood

April 2018 General Conference

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The magnifying of the holy priesthood you hold is vital to the work of the Lord in your families and in your Church callings.

My beloved brethren, we have heard a revelatory announcement from President Russell M. Nelson. We have heard important elaborations by Elders Christofferson and Rasband and by President Eyring. What will yet be said, including more from President Nelson, will elaborate what you, the Lord's leaders and priesthood holders, will now do in your responsibilities. To help with that, I will review some fundamental principles governing the priesthood you hold.

I. The Priesthood

The Melchizedek Priesthood is the divine authority God has delegated to accomplish His work "to bring to pass the ... eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). In 1829, it was conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by the Savior's Apostles Peter, James, and John (see D&C 27:12). It is sacred and powerful beyond our powers to describe.

The *keys* of the priesthood are the powers to direct the exercise of priesthood authority. Thus, when the Apostles conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood upon Joseph and Oliver, they also gave them the keys to direct its exercise (see D&C 27:12–13). But not all priesthood keys were conferred at that time. The entire keys and knowledge necessary for this "dispensation of the fulness of times" (D&C 128:18) are given "line upon line" (verse 21). Additional keys were given in the Kirtland Temple seven years later (see D&C 110:11–16). These keys were given to direct priesthood authority in the additional assignments being given at that time, such as baptism for the dead.

The Melchizedek Priesthood is not a status or a label. It is a divine power held in trust to use for the benefit of God's work for His children. We should always remember that men who hold the priesthood are *not* "the priesthood." It is not appropriate to refer to "the priesthood and the women." We should refer to "the *holders* of the priesthood and the women."

II. A Ministry of Service

Now let us consider what the Lord Jesus Christ expects from those who hold His priesthood—how we are to bring souls unto Him.

President Joseph F. Smith taught: "It has truly been said that the Church is perfectly organized. The only trouble is that these organizations are not fully alive to the obligations that rest upon them. When they become thoroughly awakened to the requirements made of them, they will

fulfil their duties more faithfully, and the work of the Lord will be all the stronger and more powerful and influential in the world.”¹

President Smith also cautioned:

“The God-given titles of honor ... associated with the several offices in and orders of the Holy Priesthood, are not to be used nor considered as are the titles originated by man; they are not for adornment nor are they expressive of mastership, but rather of appointment to humble service in the work of the one Master whom we profess to serve. ...

“... We are laboring for the salvation of souls, and we should feel that this is the greatest duty devolving upon us. Therefore, we should feel willing to sacrifice everything, if need be, for the love of God, the salvation of men, and the triumph of the kingdom of God upon the earth.”²

III. The Offices of the Priesthood

In the Lord’s Church, the offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood have different functions. The Doctrine and Covenants refers to high priests as “standing presidents or servants over different stakes scattered abroad” (D&C 124:134). It refers to elders as “standing ministers to [the Lord’s] church” (D&C 124:137). Here are other teachings on these separate functions.

A high priest officiates and administers in spiritual things (see D&C 107:10, 12). Also, as President Joseph F. Smith taught, “Inasmuch as he has been ordained a high priest, [he] should feel that he is obliged ... to set an example before the old and young worthy of emulation, and to place himself in a position to be a teacher of righteousness, not only by precept but more particularly by example—giving to the younger ones the benefit of the experience of age, and thus becoming individually a power in the midst of the community in which he dwells.”³

On the duties of an elder, Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve taught: “An elder is a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. ... He is commissioned to stand in the place and stead of his Master ... in ministering to his fellowmen. He is the Lord’s agent.”⁴

Elder McConkie criticized the idea that one is “only an elder.” “Every elder in the Church holds as much priesthood as the President of the Church ... ,” he said. “What is an elder? He is a shepherd, a shepherd serving in the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd.”⁵

In this important function to minister in the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd, there is no distinction between the offices of high priest and elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood. In the great section 107 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord declares, “High priests after the order of the Melchizedek Priesthood have a right to officiate in their own standing, under the direction of the presidency, in administering spiritual things, and also in the office of an elder [or offices in the Aaronic Priesthood]” (D&C 107:10; see also verse 12).

The most important principle for all priesthood holders is the principle taught by the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob. After he and his brother Joseph were consecrated priests and teachers of the people, he declared, “And we did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence” (Jacob 1:19).

Brethren, our responsibilities as holders of the priesthood are serious matters. Other organizations can be satisfied with worldly standards of performance in delivering their messages and performing their other functions. But we who hold the priesthood of God have the divine power that even governs entrance into the celestial kingdom of God. We have the purpose and the responsibility the Lord defined in the revealed preface to the Doctrine and Covenants. We are to proclaim to the world:

“That every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world;

“That faith also might increase in the earth;

“That mine everlasting covenant might be established;

“That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world” (D&C 1:20–23).

To fulfill this divine charge, we must be faithful in “magnifying” our priesthood callings and responsibilities (see D&C 84:33). President Harold B. Lee explained what it means to magnify the priesthood: “When one becomes a holder of the priesthood, he becomes an agent of the Lord. He should think of his calling as though he were on the Lord’s errand. That is what it means to magnify the priesthood.”⁶

Therefore, brethren, if the Lord Himself were to ask you to help one of His sons or daughters—which He has done through His servants—would you do it? And if you did, would you act as His agent, “on the Lord’s errand,” relying on His promised help?

President Lee had another teaching about magnifying the priesthood: “When you hold a magnifying glass over something it makes that thing look bigger than you could see it with the naked eye; that’s a magnifying glass. Now, ... if anybody magnifies their priesthood—that is, makes it bigger than they first thought it was and more important than anyone else thought it was—that is the way you magnify your priesthood.”⁷

Here is an example of a priesthood holder magnifying his priesthood responsibility. I heard this from Elder Jeffrey D. Erekson, my companion in a stake conference in Idaho. As a young married elder, desperately poor and feeling unable to finish his last year of college, Jeffrey decided to drop out and accept an attractive job offer. A few days later his elders quorum president came to his home. “Do you understand the significance of the priesthood keys I hold?” the elders quorum president asked. When Jeffrey said he did, the president told him that since hearing of his intention to drop out of college, the Lord had tormented him during sleepless nights to give Jeffrey this message: “As your elders quorum president, I counsel you not to drop out of college. That is a message to you from the Lord.” Jeffrey stayed in school. Years later I met him when he was a successful businessman and heard him tell an audience of priesthood holders, “That [counsel] has made all the difference in my life.”

A priesthood holder magnified his priesthood and calling, and that made “all the difference” in the life of another child of God.

IV. Priesthood in the Family

Up to now, I have been speaking of the functions of the priesthood in the Church. Now I will speak of priesthood in the family. I begin with keys. The principle that priesthood authority can be exercised only under the direction of the one who holds the keys for that function is fundamental in the Church but does not apply to the exercise of priesthood authority in the family.⁸ A father who holds the priesthood presides in his family by the authority of the priesthood he holds. He has no need to have the direction or approval of priesthood keys in order to counsel the members of his family, hold family meetings, give priesthood blessings to his wife and children, or give healing blessings to family members or others.

If fathers would magnify their priesthood in their own family, it would further the mission of the Church as much as anything else they might do. Fathers who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood should keep the commandments so they will have the power of the priesthood to give blessings to their family members. Fathers should also cultivate loving family relationships so that family members will want to ask their fathers for blessings. And parents should encourage more priesthood blessings in the family.

Fathers, function as “equal partners” of your wives, as the family proclamation teaches.⁹ And, fathers, when you are privileged to exercise the power and influence of your priesthood authority, do so “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). That high standard for the exercise of priesthood authority is most important in the family. President Harold B. Lee gave this promise just after he became President of the Church: “Never is the power of the priesthood, which you hold, more wonderful than when there is a crisis in your home, a serious illness, or some great decision that has to be made. ... Vested in the power of the priesthood, which is the power of Almighty God, is the power to perform miracles if the Lord wills it so, but in order for us to use that priesthood, we must be worthy to exercise it. A failure to understand this principle is a failure to receive the blessings of holding that great priesthood.”¹⁰

My beloved brethren, the magnifying of the holy priesthood you hold is vital to the work of the Lord in your families and in your Church callings.

I testify of Him whose priesthood it is. Through His atoning suffering and sacrifice and resurrection, all men and women have the assurance of immortality and the opportunity for eternal life. Each of us should be faithful and diligent in doing our part in this great work of God our Eternal Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.