

# Faith and the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood

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*Go forward in faith in keeping your covenants with God and so claim the promise He has made to you with an oath.*



**M**y purpose tonight is to help you grow in your confidence that you can and will rise to the blessings of the oath and covenant of the priesthood. It is the magnitude of the possible consequences of that oath and covenant which may require a regular boost in your confidence.

The Lord has made those consequences clear. Rising to the possibilities of the oath and covenant brings the greatest of all the gifts of God: eternal life. That is a purpose of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Through

keeping the covenants as we receive the priesthood and renewing them in the temple ceremonies, we are promised by an oath made by our Heavenly Father, Elohim, that we will gain the fulness of His glory and live as He lives. We will have the blessing of being sealed in a family forever with the promise of eternal increase.

As you would expect, failing to claim such a blessing would bring tragic consequences. The Lord was clear about that as well. These are the words often read to young men by their leaders when they are approaching the time when they may receive the Melchizedek Priesthood. You likely will remember your feelings when you first heard them. They are the words of the Savior Jesus Christ given to us through the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord;

“For he that receiveth my servants receiveth me;

“And he that receiveth me receiveth my Father;

“And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

“And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood.

“Therefore, all those who receive the priesthood, receive this oath and covenant of my Father, which he cannot break, neither can it be moved.

“But whoso breaketh this covenant after he hath received it, and altogether turneth therefrom, shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come.

“And wo unto all those who come not unto this priesthood which ye have received, which I now confirm upon you who are present this day, by mine own voice out of the heavens; and even I have given the heavenly hosts and mine angels charge concerning you.

“And I now give unto you a commandment to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, if you are like I was when I first heard those words as a young man, the challenge of accepting the Melchizedek Priesthood could seem daunting. There are at least two reasons why you should be confident rather than discouraged with the penalties that would follow either failing to keep the oath and covenant or deciding not to accept it. Whether you accept the oath and covenant and find it too difficult or if you fail to try, the penalty is the same. There is no question, therefore, that your best course and mine is to receive the holy priesthood and try with all of our hearts to keep its covenants. If we choose not to try, we would certainly lose the opportunity for eternal life. If we try and with God’s help succeed, we will gain eternal life.

There is yet another reason to decide now that you will try with all your heart to qualify for that oath and covenant and have confidence that you will succeed. God promises you the help and power which, if you exercise faith, will give you success.



Let me describe some of the blessings you will receive as you go forward in faith.

First, the very fact that you have been offered the oath and covenant is evidence that God has chosen you, knowing your power and capacity. He has known you since you were with Him in the spirit world. With His foreknowledge of your strength, He has allowed you to find the true Church of Jesus Christ and to be offered the priesthood. You can feel confidence because you have

evidence of His confidence in you.

Second, as you will try to keep your covenants, the Savior has promised His personal help. He has said that as you go forward in honoring the priesthood: “There I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.”<sup>2</sup>

You may at times need reassurance, as I do, that you will have the strength to meet your obligations in

this sacred priesthood. The Lord foresaw your need for reassurance. He said, “For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.”<sup>3</sup>

I have seen that promise fulfilled in my own life and in the lives of others. A friend of mine served as a mission president. He told me that at the end of every day while he was serving, he could barely make it upstairs to bed at night wondering if he would have the strength to face another day. Then in the morning, he would find his strength and his courage restored. You have seen it in the lives of aged prophets who seemed to be renewed each time they stood to testify of the Lord Jesus Christ and the restored gospel. That is a promise for those who go forward in faith in their priesthood service.

You are also promised that you will be given the power to bear testimony and that in the process you will be cleansed and made fit for the eternal life which you have been promised:

“For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you.

“Therefore, go ye into all the world; and unto whatsoever place ye cannot go ye shall send, that the testimony may go from you into all the world unto every creature.”<sup>4</sup>

And with that promise the Lord has honored you by saying of you, “Ye are they whom my Father hath given me; ye are my friends.”<sup>5</sup>

There is another wonderful blessing that will encourage you as you keep your priesthood covenants. Priesthood service will prepare you for living in eternal families. It will change your feelings about what it

means to be a husband or a father or a son or a brother. That change in your heart will come as you feel your faith grow and the promise of eternal life through the Melchizedek Priesthood becomes real to you.

That happened to Parley P. Pratt when the Prophet Joseph Smith first taught him the doctrine of eternal families. Parley P. Pratt wrote:

“It was at this time that I received from him the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those inexpressibly endearing relationships which none but the highly intellectual, the refined and pure in heart, know how to prize, and which are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness. . . .

“It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore. . . .

“I had loved before, but I knew not why. But now I loved—with a pureness—an intensity of elevated, exalted feeling. . . . I felt that God was my heavenly Father indeed; that Jesus was my brother, and that the wife of my bosom was an immortal, eternal companion; a kind ministering angel, given to me as a comfort, and a crown of glory for ever and ever.”<sup>6</sup>

I am a personal witness that priesthood service pursued in faith has such an effect in changing our hearts and our feelings. A young man hearing my words today can have confidence that by honoring his priesthood he will be protected against the temptation to sexual sin so prevalent in the world in



which we live. It will be possible for the Aaronic Priesthood holder hearing me tonight, as his faith increases in the sure reward of eternal life through the eternal priesthood, that he will have the power to see in the daughters of God their true worth and in the promise of a posterity a reason to be pure and to stay clean.

In the same way, faith in the oath and covenant will lead us to develop the feelings of charity essential to an eternal family. One of the promises we make as we accept the priesthood is to care for others.

I have seen the miracle of that growth in charity in the hearts of priesthood holders. So have many of you. And so have many outside the Church. I was in the office of President Gordon B. Hinckley when he was asked to take a phone call. He spoke briefly on the phone and then returned to our conversation. But he took a moment to explain. He said that the call was from the president of the United States, who was flying over Utah in Air Force One on his way to Washington. The president of the United States had called to thank President Hinckley for what priesthood holders had done in the

aftermath of a hurricane. The president of the United States had said that it was a miracle that we were able to get so many people, so quickly, working together so well. He praised our people by saying that we knew how to do things.

Perhaps the president of the United States was impressed with what he thought were our great organizational skills. That was part of the miracle. But the greater reason for the miracle was that hundreds and perhaps thousands of priesthood holders had such faith in the oath and covenant of the priesthood. It was not how they were organized that made the difference: faith in the oath and covenant of the priesthood impelled them to go long distances, stay long hours, and endure hardship as representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ in caring for those in great need.

They were in that process of giving priesthood service, developing the power and the spirit of charity necessary to become great husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers in families here and in families forever. Those instances of priesthood service have occurred in our outreach to people, as brothers and sisters in God’s family across the earth, time and time again.

My prayer is that you will decide tonight, and then every day, to go forward in faith in keeping your covenants with God and so claim the promise He has made to you with an oath. You can do it in simple things. When you meet with your quorum, you can decide to see them as brothers in the family of God. There will be someone in your quorum or priesthood group who is in need. He may not show it. You may not be able to see it with your eyes. But God knows and invites you to be His servant in helping him.

You can be like the priesthood holder who every time I saw him in our priesthood service together



would ask, “How’s Grandma?” He had never met my mother-in-law, as far as I know. But he somehow found out about her illness and her great age. I cannot tell you how much it meant to me to see the hand of God reaching out to me and my wife in consolation and comfort through a priesthood holder. You can have that same effect every time you gather with priesthood holders if you always think of your covenant to succor and help those whose hands hang down and who carry heavy burdens. As you do, you will be developing the very qualities which will qualify you to be a member of a family forever.

There is another thing you can do. You can study the word of God, not for yourself alone but to be an emissary of the Lord Jesus Christ to all the world. When you increase your power to teach the gospel, you are qualifying to help Heavenly Father in gathering His children. As you do that, another blessing will come. Should the need ever come in family life in this world, or in

the world to come, to draw back lost sheep, you will have received more power than you may now recognize.

The Lord describes that wonderful blessing in Alma 13:6: “And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest.”

You may have confidence in your service with this promise of success:

“Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

“And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.”<sup>7</sup>

I testify that God the Father lives. You have made covenants with Him. He offers you an oath, a promise of eternal life, which He cannot break. I testify to you that the priesthood is the power by which God through His Son, Jesus Christ, created the worlds. I testify that God wants you to succeed and to come home again to live with Him in families forever. I testify to you that this is the true Church of Jesus Christ. In it are the keys of the priesthood. It is that priesthood with which God has honored you. I promise you that He knows your capacities and that they are sufficient that you may with full faith have the hope of eternal life for you and for your families forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. D&C 84:35–43.
2. D&C 84:88.
3. D&C 84:33.
4. D&C 84:61–62.
5. D&C 84:63.
6. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (1938), 259–60.
7. Alma 13:12–13.