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The Power of the Priesthood

The priesthood does not have the strength that it should have and will not have until the power of the priesthood is firmly fixed in the families.

I speak to the fathers of the families and to families everywhere in the Church.

Years ago we began correlation under the direction of President Harold B. Lee. At that time President Thomas S. Monson said: “Today, we are encamped against the greatest array of sin, vice, and evil ever assembled before our eyes. . . . The battle plan whereby we fight to save the souls of men is not our own. It [came through] the inspiration and revelation of the Lord.”¹

During those years of correlation, the whole operating face of the Church was changed. The entire curriculum was restructured. The objectives and relationships of the organizations one to another were redefined. The key word during those years of correlation and restructuring was *priesthood*.

President Monson also spoke of Gideon, a hero in the Old Testament. Gideon was chosen to lead the armies of Israel, thousands strong. But of them all, he chose only 300 men.

Gideon had an interesting way of selecting his recruits. When the men drank water at a stream, most “bowed

down . . . to drink.” Those he passed over. A few scooped up water in their hands and drank, remaining completely alert. They were the ones chosen.²

We live in a day of “wars [and] rumors of wars, and earthquakes in divers places.”³ As prophesied, “the whole earth [is] in commotion”⁴ and “Satan is abroad in the land.”⁵ He seeks to destroy all that is good and righteous.⁶ He is Lucifer, who was cast out of the presence of God.⁷ Against all of that, we have very positive feelings about what lies ahead.

Gideon’s small force succeeded because, as the record states, “they stood every man in his place.”⁸

This “dispensation of the fulness of times”⁹ opened with the appearance of the Father and the Son to the boy Joseph Smith.¹⁰ Next the angel Moroni showed Joseph where the plates containing the Book of Mormon had been buried.¹¹ Joseph was given power to translate them.¹²

During translation Joseph and Oliver Cowdery read about baptism. They prayed to know what to do.¹³ There appeared to them an angelic messenger, John the Baptist. He conferred



upon them the Aaronic Priesthood, “which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.”¹⁴

The Apostles Peter, James, and John, who were closest to the Lord in His ministry, appeared next and conferred upon Joseph and Oliver the higher priesthood,¹⁵ or “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God.”¹⁶ The priesthood, the scriptures direct, was to be named after Melchizedek, the great high priest to whom Abraham paid tithes.¹⁷

This then became their authority. Through the keys of the priesthood, they had access to all of the powers of heaven. They were commanded to carry the gospel unto all nations.¹⁸

It has never been easy to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was not easy when He lived, and it was not easy in the early days of the Church. The early Saints were subjected to unspeakable suffering and opposition.

It has been over 180 years since the priesthood was restored. We now number nearly 14 million members. Even so, we are a tiny fraction when compared to the billions of people on earth. But we are who we are, and we know what we know, and we are to go forth and preach the gospel.

The Book of Mormon makes it clear that we never will dominate by numbers. But we have the power of the priesthood.¹⁹

The prophet Nephi wrote, “It came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few . . . ; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small.”²⁰

President Joseph Fielding Smith said, “While it may be said . . . that we are but a handful in comparison with . . . the world, yet we may be compared with the leaven of which the Savior spoke, which will eventually leaven [or lift] the whole world.”²¹

We can and in due time certainly will influence all of humanity. It will be known who we are and why we are. It might seem hopeless; it is monumentally difficult; but it is not only possible but certain that we will win the battle against Satan.

Some years ago I gave a talk entitled “What Every Elder Should Know: A Primer on Principles of Priesthood Government.” Later, when it was to be published, I changed the title to read “What Every Elder Should Know—and Every Sister as Well.”²²

I include the sisters because it is

crucial for everyone to understand what is expected of the brethren. Unless we enlist the attention of the mothers and daughters and sisters—who have influence on their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers—we cannot progress. The priesthood will lose great power if the sisters are neglected.

Priesthood is the authority and the power which God has granted to men on earth to act for Him.²³ When priesthood authority is exercised properly, priesthood bearers do what He would do if He were present.

We have done very well at distributing the *authority* of the priesthood. We have priesthood authority planted nearly everywhere. We have quorums of elders and high priests worldwide. But distributing the *authority* of the priesthood has raced, I think, ahead of distributing the *power* of the priesthood. The priesthood does not have the strength that it should have and will not have until the *power* of the priesthood is firmly fixed in the families as it should be.

President Harold B. Lee stated: “It seems clear to me that the Church has *no choice*—and never has had—but to do more to assist the *family* in carrying out *its* divine mission, not only because that is the order of heaven, but also because that is the

most *practical* contribution we can make to our youth—to help improve the quality of life in the Latter-day Saint homes. As important as our many programs and organizational efforts are, these *should not* supplant the home; they should *support* the home.”²⁴

President Joseph F. Smith made this statement about the priesthood in the home: “In the home the presiding authority is always vested in the father, and in all home affairs and family matters there is no other authority paramount. To illustrate this principle, a single incident will perhaps suffice. It sometimes happens that the elders are called in to administer to the members of a family. Among these elders there may be presidents of stakes, apostles, or even members of the first presidency of the Church. It is not proper under these circumstances for the father to stand back and expect the elders to direct the administration of this important ordinance. The father is there. It is his right and it is his duty to preside. He should select the one who is to administer the oil, and the one who is to be mouth in prayer, and he should not feel that because there are present presiding authorities in the Church that he is therefore divested of his rights to direct the administration of that blessing of the gospel in his home. (If the father be absent, the mother should request the presiding authority present to take charge.) The father presides at the table, at prayer, and gives general directions relating to his family life whoever may be present.”²⁵

During the Vietnam War, we held a series of special meetings for members of the Church called into military service. After such a meeting in Chicago, I was standing next to President Harold B. Lee when a fine young Latter-day Saint told President Lee that he was on leave to visit his

home and then had orders to Vietnam. He asked President Lee to give him a blessing.

Much to my surprise, President Lee said, “Your father should give you the blessing.”

Very disappointed, the boy said, “My father wouldn’t know how to give a blessing.”

President Lee answered, “Go home, my boy, and tell your father that you are going away to war and want to receive a father’s blessing from him. If he does not know how, tell him that you will sit on a chair. He can stand behind you and put his hands on your head and say whatever comes.”

This young soldier went away sorrowing.

About two years later I met him again. I do not recall where. He reminded me of that experience and said, “I did as I was told to do. I explained to my father that I would sit on the chair and that he should put his hands on my head. The power of the priesthood filled both of us. That was a strength and protection in those perilous months of battle.”

Another time I was in a distant city. After a conference we were ordaining and setting apart leaders. As we concluded, the stake president asked,



“Can we ordain a young man to be an elder who is leaving for the mission field?” The answer, of course, was yes.

As the young man came forward, he motioned for three brethren to follow and stand in for his ordination.

I noticed on the back row a carbon copy of this boy, and I asked, “Is that your father?”

The young man said, “Yes.”

I said, “Your father will ordain you.”

And he protested, “But I’ve already asked another brother to ordain me.”

And I said, “Young man, your father will ordain you, and you’ll live to thank the Lord for this day.”

Then the father came forward.

Thank goodness he was an elder. Had he not been, he soon could have been! In the military they would call that a battlefield commission. Sometimes such things are done in the Church.

The father did not know how to ordain his son. I put my arm around him and coached him through the ordinance. When he was finished, the young man was an elder. Then something wonderful happened. Completely changed, the father and son embraced. It was obvious that had never happened before.

The father, through his tears, said, “I didn’t get to ordain my other boys.”

Think how much more was accomplished than if another had ordained him, even an Apostle.

While the priesthood is presently all over the world, we call on every elder and high priest, every holder of the priesthood to stand, like Gideon’s small but powerful force of 300, *in his own place*. We now must awaken in every elder and high priest, in every quorum and group, and in the father of every home the power of the priesthood of the Almighty.

The Lord said that “the weak things



of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones.”²⁶

The prophet Nephi also told of “the power of the Lamb of God, that it descended upon the saints of the church of the Lamb, and upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth” and said that “they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory.”²⁷

We need everyone. The tired or worn out or lazy and even those who are bound down with guilt must be restored through repentance and forgiveness. Too many of our priesthood brethren are living below their privileges and the Lord’s expectations.

We must go forward, confident of the supernal power of the priesthood. It is a source of strength and encouragement to know who we are and what we have and what we must do in the work of the Almighty.

The Lord has said, “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.”²⁸

Homes without the priesthood are to be watched over and ministered to by the quorums of the priesthood. In this manner no blessings will be found wanting in any dwelling within the Church.

Years ago a family gathered at the

bedside of an aged little Danish woman. Among them was her middle-aged, wayward son. For the past number of years he had been living at home.

Tearfully he pleaded, “Mama, you’ve got to live. Mama, you can’t die.” He said, “Mama, you can’t go. I won’t let you go.”

The little mother looked up at her son and in her broken Danish accent said, “But ver is yo powah?”—where is your power?

Paul said:

“[We] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

“In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

“In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”²⁹

That the work of the Lord will prevail is not a question. That we must marshal all of our efforts and unify ourselves are givens.

The authority of the priesthood is with us. After all that we have correlated and organized, it is now our responsibility to activate the *power* of the priesthood in the Church. *Authority* in the priesthood comes by way of ordination; *power* in the priesthood comes through faithful and

obedient living in honoring covenants. It is increased by exercising and using the priesthood in righteousness.

Now, fathers, I would remind you of the sacred nature of your calling. You have the power of the priesthood directly from the Lord to protect your home. There will be times when all that stands as a shield between your family and the adversary’s mischief will be that power. You will receive direction from the Lord by way of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The adversary is not actively disturbing our Church meetings—perhaps only occasionally. By and large we are free to assemble as we wish without much disruption. But he and those who follow him are persistent in attacking the home and the family.

The ultimate end of all activity in the Church is that a man and his wife and their children might be happy at home, protected by the principles and laws of the gospel, sealed safely in the covenants of the everlasting priesthood.

Every law and principle and power, every belief, every ordinance and ordination, every covenant, every sermon and every sacrament, every counsel and correction, the sealings, the calls, the releases, the service—all these have as their ultimate purpose the perfection of the individual and the family,

for the Lord has said, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”³⁰

I bear witness of the power of the priesthood given to the Church to protect us and guide us. And because we have that, we have no fear of the future. Fear is the opposite of faith. We move forward, certain that the Lord will watch over us, particularly in the family. Of Him I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Correlation Brings Blessings,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Apr. 1967, 247.
2. See Judges 7:4–8.
3. Mormon 8:30; see also Doctrine and Covenants 45:26; Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:23, 28.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 45:26; see also Doctrine and Covenants 88:91.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 52:14.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 10:22–23.
7. See Revelation 12:7–9; Doctrine and Covenants 29:36–37; 76:25–26.
8. Judges 7:21.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 112:30.
10. See Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
11. See Joseph Smith—History 1:33–34, 59.
12. See Book of Mormon introduction; Doctrine and Covenants 135:3.
13. See Joseph Smith—History 1:68–69.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 13:1.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 27:12–13.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 107:3.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:2–4; see also Hebrews 7:1–4; Alma 13:15.
18. See Doctrine and Covenants 42:58.
19. See 1 Nephi 14:14.
20. 1 Nephi 14:12.
21. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, Oct. 1968, 123.
22. See Boyd K. Packer, “What Every Elder Should Know—and Every Sister as Well: A Primer on Principles of Priesthood Government,” *Tambuli*, Nov. 1994, 15–24; *Ensign*, Feb. 1993, 7–13.
23. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 141; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 14:28–31, in Bible appendix.
24. Harold B. Lee, “Preparing Our Youth,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1971, 3; emphasis added.
25. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 287.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 1:19.
27. 1 Nephi 14:14.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
29. Ephesians 2:20–22.
30. Moses 1:39.