



THE HONOR AND ORDER OF THE Priesthood

By President Boyd K. Packer

President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



“The authority and power of the priesthood form the foundation of all that we do in the Church,” said President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹ During his more than 40-year ministry as a member of the Twelve, President Packer has elaborated on that statement, speaking extensively on the priesthood—its importance, its proper use, and its keys. The following excerpts highlight some of his significant teachings on the priesthood, including his witness as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Keys of Priesthood

In 1976 an area general conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark. Following the closing session, President Spencer W. Kimball [1895–1985] desired to visit the Vor Frue Church, where the Thorvaldsen statues of the *Christus* and of the Twelve Apostles stand. . . .

“To the front of the church, behind the altar, stands the familiar statue of the *Christus* with His arms turned forward and somewhat outstretched, the hands showing the imprint of the nails, and the wound in His side very clearly visible. Along each side stand the statues of the Apostles, Peter at the front to the right and the other Apostles in order.

“Most of our group was near the rear of the chapel with the custodian. I stood up front with

President Kimball before the statue of Peter with Elder Rex D. Pinegar and Johan Helge Benthin, president of the Copenhagen stake.

“In Peter’s hand, depicted in marble, is a set of heavy keys. President Kimball pointed to those keys and explained what they symbolized. Then, in an act I shall never forget, he turned to President Benthin and with unaccustomed firmness pointed his finger at him and said, ‘I want you to tell everyone in Denmark that I hold the keys! We hold the *real* keys, and we use them every day.’

“I will never forget that declaration, that testimony from the prophet. The influence was spiritually powerful; the impression was physical in its impact.

“We walked to the back of the chapel where the rest of the group was standing.



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Pointing to the statues, President Kimball said to the kind custodian, ‘These are the dead Apostles.’ Pointing to me, he said, ‘Here we have the *living* Apostles. Elder Packer is an Apostle. Elder Thomas S. Monson and Elder L. Tom Perry are Apostles, and I am an Apostle. We are the living Apostles.

“‘You read about the Seventies in the New Testament, and here are two of the living Seventies, Elder Rex D. Pinegar and Elder Robert D. Hales.’

“The custodian, who up to that time had shown no emotion, suddenly was in tears.

“I felt I had had an experience of a lifetime.”²

The Priesthood Is Not Divisible

“The priesthood is greater than any of its offices. When someone first receives the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood, it is conferred upon him by the laying on of hands. After the priesthood has been conferred upon him, he is ordained to an office in the priesthood. All offices derive their authority from the priesthood.

“The priesthood is not divisible. An elder holds as much priesthood as an Apostle (see D&C 20:38). When a man receives the priesthood, he receives all of it. However, there are offices within the priesthood—divisions of authority and responsibility. One may exercise his priesthood according to the rights of the office to which he is ordained or set apart. . . .

“Whoever holds the Melchizedek Priesthood or higher priesthood holds all of the authority of the Aaronic or lesser priesthood as well.”³

The Preparatory Priesthood

“The fact that it is called the lesser priesthood does not diminish at all the importance of the Aaronic Priesthood. The Lord said it is necessary to the Melchizedek Priesthood. (See D&C 84:29.) Any holder of the higher priesthood should feel greatly honored to perform the ordinances of the Aaronic Priesthood, for they have great spiritual importance.

“I have, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, passed the sacrament. I assure you I have felt honored and humbled beyond expression to do what some might consider a routine task. . . .

“Anciently they looked forward to the atonement of Christ through the ceremony of the sacrifice. We look back to that same event through the ordinance of the sacrament.

“Both sacrifice before, and the sacrament afterward, are centered in Christ, the shedding of His blood, and the atonement He made for our sins. Both then and now the authority to perform these ordinances belongs to the Aaronic Priesthood.

“This is indeed a sacred responsibility and includes you in a brotherhood with those ancient servants of the Lord. It is no wonder that we feel so humble when we participate

in the ordinances assigned to the Aaronic Priesthood. . . .

“A few of you who now sit there as deacons, teachers, and priests will one day sit here as Apostles and prophets and will preside over the Church. *You must be prepared.*”

“It is indeed correct to call the Aaronic Priesthood the preparatory priesthood.”⁴

An Invitation to Prospective Elders

“The office of an elder is a calling of dignity and honor, spiritual authority and of power. The designation ‘prospective’ implies hope and optimism and possibility. Now I speak to them today, knowing there are perhaps many others to whom this message will apply. . . .

“If you will return to the environment where spiritual truths are spoken, there will flood back into your minds the things that you thought were lost. Things smothered under many years of disuse and inactivity will emerge. Your ability to understand them will be quickened. . . .

“If you will make your pilgrimage back among the Saints, soon you will be understanding once again the language of inspiration. And more quickly than you know, it will seem that you have never been away. Oh, how important it is for you to realize that if you will return, it can be made as though you have never been away. . . .

“Soon you will feel complete and adequate in His church and in His kingdom. Then you will know how much you are needed here and how powerful your voice of experience can be in redeeming others.”⁵

Callings in the Priesthood

“A call is more than an invitation or a request. It is a call from the Lord through His chosen servant. Years ago, President

Spencer W. Kimball, then president of a stake in Arizona, had an experience with extending a calling. There was a vacancy in the presidency of the Young Men organization in the stake. President Kimball left his desk at the bank, walked down the street a few doors into a business, and said, ‘Jack, how would you like to be president of the Young Men in the stake?’

“Jack said, ‘Oh, Spencer, you don’t mean me.’

“He said, ‘Of course I do. You’re a young man, and you get along with young people. You’d make a very good president.’

“Then there occurred what President Kimball thought was a very disagreeable conversation because Jack turned down the call. He went back to the bank and sat at his desk, smoldering over his failure. Then it came to him. He left his desk, went down the street—same door, same man—called him by his full name, and said, ‘Last Sunday the stake presidency met to consider a vacancy in the Young Men’s presidency. We prayed about it, talked about it. Finally, on our knees we inquired about it and received the inspiration from the Lord that you should be called. As a servant of the Lord, I am here to deliver that call.’

“Jack said, ‘Well, Spencer, if you’re going to put it that way.’

“And he said, ‘I’m putting it that way.’”⁶

“Every elder should know that a call is more than an invitation or a request, even more than an assignment. Too frequently we hear such expressions as, ‘I have been asked to serve as a counselor in the elders quorum presidency.’ It would be more proper to say, ‘I have been called to serve as a counselor.’

“We do not call ourselves to offices in the Church. Rather we respond to the call of those who preside over us. It is the responsibility of those who preside to prayerfully consult the

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Lord as to His will concerning a position in the Church. Then the principle of revelation is at work. The call is then delivered by the presiding officer who is acting for the Lord.”⁷

The Importance of Ordination

“The priesthood is conferred through ordination, not simply through making a covenant or receiving a blessing. It has been so since the beginning. Regardless of what they may assume or imply or infer from anything which has been said or written, past or present, specific ordination to an office in the priesthood is the way, and the only way, it has been or is now conferred.

“And the scriptures make it very clear that the only valid conferring of the priesthood comes from ‘one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church’ [D&C 42:11]. . . .

“Do not miss that one simple, obvious absolute: The priesthood ever and always is conferred by ordination by one who holds proper authority, and it is known to the Church that he has it. And even when the priesthood has been conferred, an individual has no authority beyond that which belongs to the specific office to which one has been ordained. Those limits apply as well to an office to which one is set apart. Unauthorized ordinations or settings apart convey nothing, neither power nor authority of the priesthood.”⁸

The Power of the Priesthood

“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. . . .

“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.”⁹

“The *power* you receive will depend on what you do with this sacred, unseen gift.

“Your authority comes through your ordination; your power comes through obedience and worthiness. . . .

“Power in the priesthood comes from doing your duty in ordinary things: attending meetings, accepting assignments, reading the scriptures, keeping the Word of Wisdom.”¹⁰

True Servants of the Lord

“We do not hear of the priesthood keys being exercised in other Christian churches. It seems odd that we are described by some as being non-Christian when we are the only ones who have the authority and the organization that He established.

“The present Twelve are very ordinary people. They are not, as the original Twelve were

not, spectacular individually, but collectively the Twelve are a power.

“We come from a variety of occupations. We are scientists, lawyers, teachers.

“Elder [Russell M.] Nelson was a pioneer heart surgeon. . . .

“Several in this Quorum were military men—a sailor, marines, pilots.

“They have held various positions in the Church: home teachers, teachers, missionaries, quorum presidents, bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, and of most importance, husbands and fathers.

“They all are students and teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What unites us is our love of the Savior and His Father’s children and our witness that He stands at the head of the Church.

“Almost to a man, the Twelve come from humble beginnings, as it was when He was here. The living Twelve are welded together in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the call came, each has put down his nets, so to speak, and followed the Lord.”¹¹

“I certify to you that the 14 men with whom I share the ordination are indeed Apostles. In declaring this, I say no more than the Lord has taught, no more than may be revealed to anyone who seeks with a sincere heart and real intent for an individual witness of the Spirit.

“These men are true servants of the Lord; give heed to their counsel.”¹²

An Apostolic Witness

“There are many qualifications that I lack. There is so much in my effort to serve that is wanting. There is only one single thing, one qualification that can explain it. Like Peter and all of those who have since been ordained, I have *that* witness.



“I know that God is our Father. He introduced His Son, Jesus Christ, to Joseph Smith. I declare to you that I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that He lives. He was born in the meridian of time. He taught His gospel and was tried. He suffered and was crucified and resurrected on the third day. He, like His Father, has a body of flesh and bone. He made His Atonement. Of Him I bear witness. Of Him I am a witness.”¹³ ■

NOTES

1. “How to Confer the Priesthood: The Doctrine, the Principle, and the Practice,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 21, 2003, 1.
2. “The Twelve,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2008, 85.
3. “What Every Elder Should Know—and Every Sister as Well: A Primer on Principles of Priesthood Government,” *Tambuli*, Nov. 1994, 17; see also *Ensign*, Feb. 1993, 8.
4. “The Aaronic Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 30–31.
5. “An Appeal to Prospective Elders,” *Ensign*, May 1975, 104, 105, 106.
6. “How to Confer the Priesthood,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 21, 2003, 1–2.
7. “What Every Elder Should Know,” *Tambuli*, Nov. 1994, 21–22; *Ensign*, Feb. 1993, 11.
8. “The Temple, the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 1993, 20.
9. “The Power of the Priesthood,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2010, 7, 9.
10. “The Aaronic Priesthood,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 32, 33.
11. “The Twelve,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2008, 85–86.
12. “The Twelve Apostles,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 8.
13. “The Twelve,” *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2008, 87.

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