



By Elder
Kenneth Johnson
Of the Seventy

Called AND Set Apart TO SERVE

Formal callings in the Church are not complete until we have been set apart by proper priesthood authority.

In a vision given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon at Hiram, Ohio, on February 16, 1832, we find these words of comfort and encouragement:

“I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear¹ me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

“Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory” (D&C 76:5–6).

During my years as a member of the Church, I have experienced a growing appreciation for what it means to be called of God and for the promised blessings associated with responding to the Lord’s invitation to serve Him.

When leaders pray to know the will of the Lord before extending a call to serve, they receive a feeling of assurance that confirms the correct action to be taken. It is both essential

and gratifying to obtain a personal witness through prayer that we have been called of God. Through His servants, the Lord invites us to participate in His work so that we can come to know and love Him more fully (see Mosiah 5:13).

Upon receiving a call to serve, we might experience feelings of inadequacy comparable to what Enoch felt when he was commissioned by the Lord to lead and teach the people (see Moses 6:31). The words “My Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify” (Moses 6:34) must have brought assurance to Enoch as he gained a vision of how the Lord would empower him to fulfill his sacred assignment. The scriptures further record what a great leader Enoch became as “he walked with God” (Moses 6:39). The experience of Enoch contains valuable lessons for each of us as we serve in the Lord’s Church.

The principle of setting apart those called to serve is expressed in the counsel of the Lord to Moses when He instructed Moses to “lay thine hand upon [Joshua]. . . . And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him” (Numbers 27:18, 20).

Through this divinely established pattern, we can rise above our individual frailties, limitations, and even opposition. Consider the experience of Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman: “The Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words” (Helaman 5:45; see also verses 17–19).

Teaching by the Spirit

In a revelation to Joseph Smith, the Lord posed the following question: “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?”² (D&C 50:13). The Lord responds, “To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth” (D&C 50:14).

Clearly, there are constraints concerning the manner in which we should teach sacred truths:

“Remember that that which cometh from above is sacred, and must be spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit” (D&C 63:64).

“He that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth

by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

“And if it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:17–18).

When we are called to a position in the Church as a leader or a teacher, our commission is to teach the word of God by the Spirit of God, not by “the philosophies of men interlaced with a few scriptures.”³ Like Enoch, Nephi, and Lehi, we too can receive help from on high through the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

We might conclude that having heard or read information concerning a doctrine or principle will suffice. But such an approach reflects a failure to recognize that a deeper comprehension of principles comes through personal revelation (see Job 32:8). Consider this inspired observation by Hyrum Smith, brother of the Prophet: “Preach the first principles of the Gospel—preach them over again: you will find that day after day new ideas and additional light concerning them will be revealed to you. You can enlarge upon them so as to comprehend them clearly.”⁴

Following the Savior’s Example

Our greatest example in all things is the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is written:

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

“For he taught them as one having



authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28–29; see also Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 7:36–37).

Alma, the great Book of Mormon prophet, exemplified this approach: “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5).

When entrusted with the sacred responsibility to teach the gospel, let us follow the example of the Savior and declare with Him, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me” (John 7:16). ■

NOTES

1. In scripture, our “fear” toward Deity relates to the concept of “reverence.” President David O. McKay (1873–1970) provided insight into this divine characteristic, stating, “Reverence is profound respect mingled with love” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 86).
2. In scripture, “ordain” and “set apart” are used interchangeably (see D&C 20:67; 25:7; see also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 3:106).
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Teacher Come from God,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 26; see also Mosiah 18:19–22.
4. Hyrum Smith, in *History of the Church*, 6:323.



BEING SET APART

“The setting apart is an established practice in the

Church and men and women are ‘set apart’ to special responsibility, in ecclesiastical, quorum, and auxiliary positions. . . .

“To some folk the setting apart seems a perfunctory act while others anticipate it eagerly, absorb every word of it, and let their lives be lifted thereby.

“The setting apart may be taken literally; it is a setting apart from sin, apart from the carnal; apart from everything which is crude, low, vicious, cheap, or vulgar; *set apart* from the world to a higher [plane] of thought and activity. The blessing is conditional upon faithful performance.”

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 478.