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MEN AND WOMEN AND PRIESTHOOD POWER



*Let us never forget
that we are the sons
and daughters of
God, equal in His
sight with differing
responsibilities and
capabilities assigned
by Him and given
access to His priest-
hood power.*

My grandfather Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939), a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was in the hospital suffering end-stage leukemia in 1939. My father, who was sitting at Grandfather's bedside, told me that Grandfather pushed himself up in bed, looked around his hospital room as though he were addressing a congregation, and said clearly, "And above all else, brethren, let us think straight."

In what I say, please keep in mind and think straight about the basic doctrines of Christ that include the love our Father in Heaven has for His daughters, who are precious and essential to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I believe there are some truths that both women and men need to understand about the essential role women have in strengthening and building up the kingdom of God on the earth.

We are beloved spirit sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. We lived with Him in the premortal realms. In order to fulfill the

mission of bringing "to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39), Heavenly Father designed a plan to help His children achieve their ultimate potential.

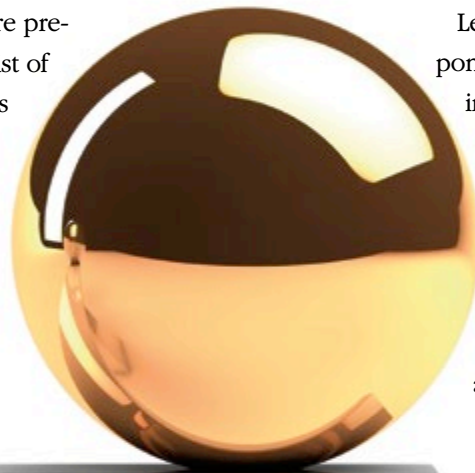
There are those who question the place of women in God's plan and in the Church. I've been interviewed by enough national and international media to know that most journalists with whom I have dealt had preconceived notions about this topic. Many have asked questions implying that women are second-class citizens in the Church.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Let me suggest five key points to ponder and think straight about this important topic.

1. The Father and the Son desire our exaltation.

Our Heavenly Father created both women and men, who are His spirit daughters and sons. This means gender is



eternal. His plan is designed to help all who choose to follow Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, to achieve their destiny as heirs of eternal life.

Heavenly Father and His Son are perfect. They are omniscient and understand all things. Further, Their hopes for us are perfect. Their work and Their glory is to see Their children exalted.

Surely, if our eventual exaltation is Their essential goal and purpose, and if They are omniscient and perfect, then They understand best how to prepare, teach, and lead us so that we have the greatest chance to qualify for exaltation. Our Father in Heaven knows all, foresees all, and understands all. His comprehension, His wisdom, and His love for us are perfect. Surely we must agree that our Heavenly Father and His Son know which opportunities the sons and daughters of God need to best prepare the human family for eternal life.

Each of us has the privilege of choosing whether we will believe that God is our Father, that Jesus is the Christ, and

that They have a plan designed to help us return home to Them. This, of course, requires faith. Our testimonies, our peace of mind, and our well-being begin with the willingness to believe that our Father in Heaven does indeed know best.

2. The Church is governed through priesthood keys.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's Church, and His Church is governed by and through priesthood authority and priesthood keys. "Priesthood keys are the authority God has given to priesthood leaders to direct, control, and govern the use of His priesthood on earth. The exercise of priesthood authority is governed by those who hold its keys (see D&C 65:2; 81:2; 124:123) . . . [and] who have the right to preside over and direct the Church within a jurisdiction."¹

Those who have priesthood keys make it possible for all who serve or labor faithfully under their direction to exercise priesthood authority and access priesthood power.

Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. . . . In the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife.



All men and all women serve in the Church under the direction of those who have keys.²

I repeat something I stated in the April 2013 general conference: “In our Heavenly Father’s great priesthood-endowed plan, men have the unique responsibility to administer the priesthood, but they are not the priesthood. Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. . . . In the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife.”³

Why are men—and not women—ordained to priesthood offices? President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) explained that “it was the Lord,” not man, “who designated that men in His Church should hold the priesthood” and who endowed women with “capabilities to round out this great and marvelous organization, which is the Church and kingdom of God.”⁴ The Lord has not revealed why He has organized His Church as He has.

This matter, like many others, comes down to our faith. Do we believe that this is the Lord’s Church? Do we believe that He has organized it according to His purposes and wisdom? Do we believe that His wisdom far exceeds ours? Do we believe that He has organized His Church in a manner that would be the greatest possible blessing to all of His children, both His sons and His daughters?

I testify that these things are true. I testify that this is the Lord’s Church. Women are integral to the governance and work of the Church through service as leaders in Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary; through service as teachers, full-time missionaries, and temple ordinance workers; and in the home, where the most important teaching in the Church occurs.

Let us not forget that approximately half of all the teaching in the Church is done by sisters. Much of the leadership provided is from our sisters. Many service opportunities and activities are planned and directed by women. The participation of women in ward and stake councils and in

general councils at Church headquarters provides needed insight, wisdom, and balance.

For more than 20 years I have been teaching the importance of councils, including the vital participation of sister leaders. I acknowledge that some men, including some priesthood leaders, have not yet seen the light and still do not include our sister leaders in full partnership in ward and stake councils. I also acknowledge that some men oppress women and in some rare circumstances are guilty of abusing women. This is abhorrent in the eyes of God. I feel certain that men who demean women in any way will answer to God for their actions. And any priesthood leader who does not involve his sister leaders with full respect and inclusion is not honoring and magnifying the keys he has been given. His power and influence will be diminished until he learns the ways of the Lord.

Now, sisters, while your input is significant and welcome in effective councils, you need to be careful not to assume a role that is not yours. The most successful ward and stake councils are those in which priesthood leaders trust their sister leaders and encourage them to contribute to the discussions and in which sister leaders fully respect and sustain the decisions of the council made under the direction of priesthood leaders who hold keys.

3. Men and women are equal in God’s eyes.

Men and women are equal in God’s eyes and in the eyes of the Church, but equal does not mean the same. The responsibilities and divine gifts of men and women differ in their nature but not in their importance or influence. God does not regard either gender as better or more important than the other. President Hinckley declared to women that “our Eternal Father . . . never intended that you should be less than the crowning glory of His creations.”⁵

Some become confused and fail to think straight when comparing the assignments of men to those of women and the assignments of women to those of men.

I have been surrounded by women my entire life. I have 3 sisters. (I was the only boy.) I have 5 daughters,

24 granddaughters, and 19 great-granddaughters. And, of course, I have been blessed through 63 years of marriage to my wife, Barbara. I learned long ago to listen to her. I learned that when she said she had been thinking about something or had strong feelings about a matter pertaining to the family, I had better pay attention because in nearly every case she was inspired. I know firsthand how young adult sisters and young mothers sometimes feel and sometimes question their self-worth and their ability to contribute. But I am a witness that when their thoughts and prayers turn toward heaven, they will be blessed by a strength and conviction that the Father and the Son understand their feelings.

Women come to earth with unique spiritual gifts and propensities. This is particularly true when it comes to children and families and the well-being and nurturing of others.

Men and women have different gifts, different strengths, and different points of view and inclinations. That is one of the fundamental reasons we need each other. It takes a man and a woman to create a family, and it takes men and women to carry out the work of the Lord. A husband and wife righteously working together complete each other. Let us be careful that we do not attempt to tamper with our Heavenly Father's plan and purposes in our lives.

4. All of God's children have access to priesthood blessings.

When men and women go to the temple, they are both endowed with the same power, which by definition is priesthood power. While the authority of the priesthood is directed through priesthood keys, and priesthood keys are held only by worthy men, access to the power and blessings of the priesthood is available to all of God's children.

As President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained: “The blessings of the priesthood are not confined to men alone. These blessings are also poured out upon . . . all the faithful women of the Church. . . . The Lord offers to his daughters every spiritual gift and blessing that can be obtained by his sons.”⁶

Those who have entered the waters of baptism and

subsequently received their endowment in the house of the Lord are eligible for rich and wonderful blessings. The endowment is literally a gift of power. All who enter the house of the Lord officiate in the ordinances of the priesthood.

Our Father in Heaven is generous with His power. All men and all women have access to this power for help in their lives. All who have made sacred covenants with the Lord and who honor those covenants are eligible to receive personal revelation, to be blessed by the ministering of angels, to commune with God, to receive the fulness of the gospel, and, ultimately, to become heirs alongside Jesus Christ of all our Father has.

5. The Church needs the voice and faith of women.

We need more of the distinctive, influential voices and faith of women. We need them to learn the doctrine and to understand what we believe so that they can bear their testimonies about the truth of all things—whether those testimonies be given around a campfire at a Young Women camp, in a testimony meeting, in a blog, or on Facebook. Only faithful Latter-day Saint women can show the world what women of God who have made covenants look like and believe.

None of us can afford to stand by and watch the purposes of God be diminished and pushed aside. I invite particularly the sisters throughout the Church to seek the guidance of heaven in knowing what they can do to let their voice of faith and testimony be heard. The General Authorities and the sisters who are general officers cannot do it alone. The full-time missionaries cannot do it alone. Priesthood leaders and auxiliary leaders cannot do it alone. We must all defend our Father in Heaven and His plan. We must all defend our Savior and testify that He is the Christ, that His Church has been restored to the earth, and that there is such a thing as right and wrong.

If we are to have the courage to speak out and defend the Church, we must first prepare ourselves through study of the truths of the gospel. We need to solidify our own testimonies through diligent, daily study of the scriptures and by invoking Moroni's promise that we can “know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5) if we seek it through humble prayer and study.

Do not spend time trying to overhaul or adjust God's plan. We do not have time for that. It is a pointless exercise to try to determine how to organize the Lord's Church differently. The Lord is at the head of this Church, and we all follow His direction. Both men and women need increased faith and testimony of the life and the Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ and increased knowledge of His teachings and doctrine. We need clear minds so that the Holy Ghost can teach us what to do and what to say. We need to think straight in this world of confusion and disregard for the things of God.

Sisters, your sphere of influence is a unique sphere—one that cannot be duplicated by men. No one can defend our Savior with any more persuasion or power than can you—the daughters of God who have such inner strength and conviction. The power of the voice of a converted woman is immeasurable, and the Church needs your voices now more than ever.

I leave you my witness and my testimony that we are in

a day and a time when we must stand in unity—men and women, young men and young women, boys and girls. We must stand for the plan of our Heavenly Father. We must defend Him. He is being pushed aside. We cannot stand idly by as members of the Church and allow that to continue to happen without being courageous enough to let our voices be heard.

May God bless us to have the courage to study the simple truths of the gospel and then to share them every chance we get. ■

From a devotional address delivered at Brigham Young University on August 20, 2013. For the full address, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 2.1.1.
2. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 104.
3. M. Russell Ballard, "This Is My Work and Glory," *Ensign*, May 2013, 19.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Women of the Church," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 70.
5. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Stand Strong against the Wiles of the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 98.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Magnifying Our Callings in the Priesthood," *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 66.



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