

D&C LESSON #25

PRIESTHOOD: "THE POWER OF GODLINESS"

By Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: On Sunday, March 18, 1958, my father ordained me a Deacon. I received a letter from him that morning, and I kept it for many years. The paper itself has now disappeared, but the memory lingers. Among other things, my father told me that day that the President of the United States would never have as much power as I would soon have, unless he repented and joined the Church. Those simple words made a profound impression on my young mind. Somehow it was communicated to me that I would be authorized to act in the name of and in the place of God.

I have dealt with representatives of banks and churches, of schools and nations, of car repair shops and grocery stores. But I have also been in the presence of representatives of the most powerful beings in the universe...indeed, by the gift of heaven and the authorization of the priesthood, I have become such a representative myself.

1. ORDER IN THE RESTORATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD AND ITS OFFICES.

The church was organized in April of 1830, but it was not restored then. The restoration has been a continuing process spanning the decades since 1830. Joseph and his fellow-workers were called to *lay the foundation* of the Church:

And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth . . . (D&C 1:30)

BEHOLD, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the

grace of your Lord Jesus Christ, Being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith. (D&C 21:1,2)

Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great. (D&C 64:33)

And hearken unto the counsel of my servants Joseph, and Hyrum, and William Law, and unto the authorities which I have called to lay the foundation of Zion; and it shall be well with him forever and ever. (D&C 124:118)

To begin and to continue the process of restoration and construction of the Lord's Kingdom, the Lord called and empowered men to work in his name in all things for the welfare of Zion. The Aaronic Priesthood was restored in May of 1829, followed in few weeks by the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The Lord called apostles and elders and priests and teachers and deacons as soon as the church was organized. About a year later (February 1831) he called the first bishop. Four months later he called high priests.

The First Presidency was organized two or three years after the Church was established (D&C 81, 90) Patriarchs were first ordained in December of 1833; the first High Council met in February 1834. The Twelve and the Seventy were called in February 1835.

In our own day we have seen the rights of the priesthood extended to all worthy church members, and we have seen the establishment of a Second Quorum of Seventy as General Authorities, and of Area Authority Seventies in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Quorums of Seventy.

There is no revealed reason to suspect that the work of restoration is finished. Clearly the church will adapt to meet the challenges of increasing membership and world-wide influence. In this context, the word *restoration* would not have to refer to the creation of an organization that exactly matches one that was on the earth in earlier centuries. Rather it would refer to the creation of an organization

that matches the plan and pattern of heaven—an organization that can meet every need of every worthy member.

2. THE OATH AND COVENANT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

The recitations of D&C 84 contain the contract between priesthood bearers and the Source of all priesthood power. As we labor to bring souls to Christ, we are under covenant to do certain things. If we do those things, we bind the Lord (D&C 82:10) to do certain things as well. We will consider this in two parts according to the messages of the verses in this section:

We enter into a covenant:

- G (84:31) to “offer an acceptable offering and sacrifice in the house of the Lord.”
- G (84:33) to be faithful “unto the obtaining of these two priesthoods.”
- G (84:33) to “magnify [our] callings”
- G (84:36) to receive [the Lord’s] servants
- G (84:43) to “beware—concerning [ourselves]”
- G (84:43) “to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.”
- G (84:44) to “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.
- G (84:54) to not treat “lightly the things [we] have received---”
- G (84:57) to “remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments . . .”

God makes an oath:

- G (84:32) to “fill [us] with the glory of the Lord”
- G (84:33) to sanctify us “by the Spirit unto the renewing of [our] bodies.
- G (84:34) to make us “the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God.
- G (84:38) to give us “all that the Father hath”
- G to give his ‘angels charge concerning [us]”

Consider briefly each of those things we covenant to do and evaluate yourselves.

Are there any areas of this covenant that require attention from you? your husband? your children? It is clear enough that the Father and the Son will be faithful in their part of this agreement: They will not break it or move it.

Therefore, all those who receive the priesthood, receive this oath and covenant of my Father, which he cannot break, neither can it be moved. (D&C 84:40)

We, on the other hand must be about our Father's business with great devotion. If we break and abandon the covenant we have made in this matter, it will be bad with us.

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. (D&C 84:41)

But we must not retreat from the covenant for fear of failure. Our help is needed and commanded. I knew a man in the Army about forty years old who steadfastly and repeatedly refused ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood. He attended his meetings and paid his tithing and welcomed his home teachers. But as often as the subject of ordination to the higher priesthood was discussed, just that often he refused to consider it. He claimed to be fearful of the responsibility and consequences if he failed to measure up. To such people the Lord said:

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. (D&C 84:42)

3. PRINCIPLES FOR USING THE PRIESTHOOD

D&C 121 seems to suggest that having the priesthood and having priesthood power are not the same thing. We are told that "there are many called, but few are chosen." What prevents many of us from being chosen? Misplaced affections: "Their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and [they] aspire to

the honors of men . . .” (D&C 121:35)

The adversary is delighted when we act like sightseers, meaning those who are hearers rather than doers of the word (see James 1:22), or shoppers, meaning those preoccupied with the vain things of this world that suffocate our spirits. Satan baits us with perishable pleasures and preoccupations—our bank accounts, our wardrobes, even our waistlines—for he knows that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (see Matt. 6:21). Unfortunately, it is easy to let the blinding glare of the adversary’s enticements distract us from the light of Christ. (Sheri L. Dew, *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, p. 97)

In the spiritual realm, anatomy is a different matter than in the physical, for there, your heart is not located next to your lungs and sternum. It is located next to your time and money. Lucifer has turned many men of great potential away from the path leading to priesthood power by focusing their attention on what Sheri Dew called “perishable pleasures and preoccupations.” That focus prevents them from learning the great lesson that

the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. (D&C 121:36)

A careful scrutiny of verse 36 shows us that “the rights of the priesthood” can only be used, controlled, or handled righteously. There is no second option.

[A] young man and a friend were up hiking in the lower foothills near Cody, Wyoming. The friend jumped across a high-power line that was down, but the young man got tangled in it and was electrocuted. The friend turned and ran all the way back down to where the father lived—and it wasn’t a short distance—and told the father that his son had been electrocuted and that he was dead. The father, who was not a young man, ran all the way back up, taking about fifteen minutes. When he got up to where the boy was lying across the wires, he somehow removed the boy from the wires with a board or a large branch. Then he picked his son up in his arms and held him, saying, “In

the name of Jesus Christ and by the power and authority of the holy Melchizedek Priesthood, I command you to live." The dead boy opened up his eyes in his father's arms and was taken to the University of Utah Medical Center, where he recovered. (Vaughn J. Featherstone, "Where Following Him Can Lead Us," *Ensign*, Feb. 1981, 8)

The father of this boy could not have done the thing he did if his life was awash in unrighteousness. If he had spent secret hours with the pornography on the Internet or with vulgar, violent videos; if immoral thoughts and actions had played constantly or even frequently on the stage of his mind, if he had been abusive to his wife or children or dishonest in his business dealings, there would have been no power and no healing:

That [the rights of the priesthood] may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God. (D&C 121:37,38)

D&C 121:39 warns of unrighteous dominion, which is the effort to coerce desired actions in others by virtue of some real or pretended authority. Unrighteous dominion is an appendage to the natural man; that is to say, "almost all men." I had a battalion executive officer in the Army whose actions reminded me constantly of this verse. He was LDS by birth and record, but not by inclination or devotion. When he found that I was also LDS, but of a somewhat more faithful variety, he undertook to make my life miserable, and was excessively successful. His position of authority over me placed me in misery's way, and I was steam-rolled again and again. This is a thing the Lord will not permit in his Kingdom.

We who possess the greatest power ever given to men on the earth can never use it to force, constrain, impel, or require any desired activity. "No power or influence," the Lord taught, "can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the

priesthood . . .” (D&C 121:41)

The use of similar but differing words in both the subject and the predicate of this sentence ought to show us something. *No power or influence*—Holding an office in the priesthood will not permit you either power or influence. *Can or ought to be maintained*—You cannot do it. You ought not to do it. It seems to be both wrong and impossible at the same time.

Look at the entire passage:

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile-- Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy . . . (D&C 121:41-43)

We do not have many dictators in our Church organizations. I am convinced that the greatest application of these verses are to be found in the home. It is there that some give wholesale devotion to the practice of unrighteous dominion. *You will do it my way, because I say you will. I am bigger and smarter and I am not wrong and I am in charge here and you better not forget it or I'll ground you till you are 34 years old!*

I think it is true to say that *in an eternal sense*, nothing we are forced to do—nothing that we do against our wills—is worth doing at all.

I think of the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick, who declared: “Men will work hard for money, and men will work harder for other men, but men will work hardest of all when they are dedicated to a cause. Until willingness overflows obligation, men fight as conscripts rather than following the flag of duty as patriots. Duty is never worthily performed until it is performed by one who would gladly do more if only he could.” (Thomas S. Monson, “Happy Birthday, *Ensign*, Mar. 1995,

59)

There are words in D&C 121:43 that might be misunderstood. For example, the word “betimes” does not mean “once in a while” but “quickly, promptly, or in good season.” Then when the Lord speaks of “reproving betimes” he means reproving at the very time it is necessary. We are instructed to offer such reproofs with “sharpness.” In the context of this verse and others, the word clearly means “with precision or clarity,” not with anger and volume. Lehi warned his wicked sons not to misinterpret this in their relationship with Nephi.

And ye have murmured because he hath been plain unto you. Ye say that he hath used sharpness; ye say that he hath been angry with you; but behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God, which was in him . . . (2 Nephi 1:26)

There is one more warning about this matter of “reproving betimes with sharpness.” We are only permitted to do it when we have a revelation—“when moved upon by the Holy Ghost . . .” I have been the unwilling recipient of a few of these inspired reproofs in my life, when parents or priesthood leaders have offered much-needed correction incisively and tenderly. Whether I wanted such moments or not, I needed them, and they came without fail from disciples of Christ who followed their reproofs with an outpouring of love.

CONCLUSION: “Let thy bowels be full of charity . . .” we are told in D&C 121:45. In D&C 88:125, the Lord places the wearing of the mantel of charity “above all things.” How well this divine attribute combines with the instruction of these verses! And if we are filled with charity, and our thoughts are garnished with virtue, wonderful things will happen.

1. “Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God” (121:45)
2. “The doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven” (121:45)
3. “The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion” (121:46)
4. “Thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth” (121:46)
5. “Thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion” (121:46)

6. "Without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever" (121:46)

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