

Priesthood

The priesthood ceases to be effective whenever exercised *in any degree of unrighteousness* (D& C 131:37). However it operates by the spirit, and the spirit is not deceived, but is exquisitely sensitive to the slightest color of either fraud, pretention, self-will, ambition, cruelty, etc. *But when we undertake...to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold the heavens withdraw themselves; and the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.* (121:37). What about the “righteous” dominion of the priesthood? It can be easily recognized, for it operates *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...with bowels [full of] charity towards all me.* (121:41). Even in the eternities the power of the priesthood flows *without compulsory means...forever and ever* (121:46).

Who can deny such a power to another? No man. Who can bestow it on another? No man. We like to think that the Church is divided into those who do have the Priesthood and those who don't. However, it is the purest folly to assume that *we* can tell who has it and who does not. God alone holds the knowledge of both who is righteous and how righteous they are. Yet, *the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven and cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness* (121:34). In consequence, if there are any who really hold the priesthood, no one is in a position to say whom it may be because only by the power to command the spirits and the elements is such a gift apparent. But as far as commanding or directing other people, every man must decide for himself.

One valuable hint the Lord has given us, however, is the assurance that of all those who hold the Priesthood in the Book almost none really possess it! *That the rights of the Priesthood...may be conferred upon us, it is true, thereby becoming formal priesthood holders, but when we undertake to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, the Priesthood is void.* This is how it is in *almost all* cases in the Church: *we have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority; as they suppose they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called but few are chosen.* (121:39-40)

So, what does one have to do to be chosen? First one may not set one's heart upon the things of this world (121:35) (so much for the Priesthood as something to show off), next, one may not aspire to the honors of men (so much for the priesthood as something for prestige).

These requirements leave a few humble, unpretentious, and unworldly people as the sole holders of a valid Priesthood.

What irony! As far as the whole world is concerned, the Priesthood is a thing of value which is cruel to withhold from anyone. It enhances one's status and dignity among his fellows, whether inside the Church or outside. Yet the one thing that renders that held Priesthood completely null and void is to treat it as an aspiration among one's fellows! Priesthood is strictly an arrangement between the individual Priesthood holder and his brethren in the eternal worlds. It is as personal and private as anything can be.

We might as well recognize the fact that whatever we say and do in righteousness will be misinterpreted. We can only make things easier for ourselves in the world by going the way of the world. It would be hard to deny that the peace and prosperity of the Church in past years has not been largely due to the fruits of willingness to go the way the world goes.

Truth is encompassed in one great whole. To raise one question is to raise many others, and all issues relevant to the gospel inevitably lead to a discussion of the whole.

Is not the Priesthood everything? Not on this earth. On this earth it is nothing, and as soon as we try to use it for any kind of status, power, or rule of authority, it automatically cancels out.

For those who hold the Priesthood on this earth, the Prophet Joseph has called it "an onerous burden" not a prize. One cannot give orders to another by the Priesthood. One cannot use it to acquire prestige, fame or wealth. Far from impressing one's fellowmen, it is held in derision by them. The moment one tries to create honor or glory or exercise dominion by the Priesthood *amen to the Priesthood of the man!* The Priesthood automatically becomes null and void. What good is it then? Over whom does it exercise dominion? It exercises dominion over the elements, but not over one's fellowmen because they cannot under any circumstances be deprived of their complete free agency.

Though some may find it hard to believe, I find no cause for boasting in my Priesthood – notwithstanding nothing is easier than conferring the priesthood upon someone, that is only the beginning. Real power requires a degree of concentration, dedication, and self discipline which few ever attain. For the remainder, Priesthood is not a blessing but a terrible risk. The Priesthood is not a badge of office to be worn as a feather in a cap.

Do we really believe the First Vision? Thousands of Latter-day Saints attest to it every fast Sunday however, when the earliest, fullest, and best account of the First Vision dictated by the Prophet at the age of 26 to F.G. Williams was discovered and published in 1968, it caused not the slightest ripple of interest in the Church. It is enough, apparently, to know that God has spoken again from the heavens – never mind what he said!

Heaven's most useful lesson on this particular issue is silence in light of our own woeful ignorance. There is a connection. Where the people do not *seek* for wisdom and knowledge God will not give it to them, and so they remain in ignorance and may not ask for help from above.

Nothing pleases God more than to have his children *seek greater light and knowledge*. That is why Adam, Abraham, Enoch, Moses, and Joseph Smith were rewarded with the richest blessings. Nothing displeases Him more than to have them *seek or power, and authority, and riches* (3 Nephi 6:15). Through the years the Latter-day Saints have consistently sought not for the former but for the latter. It is only right and proper that we should stew in our own juice for a while.

I sought for the blessings of the fathers...desiring also to be one who possessed greater knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess greater knowledge (Abraham 1:2).

Twice he repeats his want for knowledge. Even to the last, after he had learned all the doctrines of salvation, Adam still *seeks for greater light and knowledge*. We should seek such knowledge eternally. But what do we hear? While at a convention of educators, a former BYU president pompously announced that, “we at the BYU are not seeking for truth because we have the truth!” This is where we stand today. It is common for BYU students to protest against being taught anything they did not know before. *Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word?...and because that I have spoken one word he need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be unto the end of man* (2 Nephi 29:8-9).

The fact is that the Latter-day Saints *will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as words can be* (2 Nephi 32:7). They are simply not interested. How little we know about things! How little we want to know. The information is far more abundant than we have been willing to realize. We only need to reach for it. Waiting for a revelation on the subject is foolish until we have exhausted all the resources already placed at our disposal.

Many Mormons in high position have long extended strong prejudice to the Indians, yet the Mormons alone, of all the people in the world, believe the Indians to be the true blood of Israel no less!

Such attitudes are strengthened by the snobbery of American suburbia. Mormons like to think of themselves WASPs. Yet it was the rural, white, Christian, Protestant Americans upon which the Lord, with his own lips, excoriated to the youthful prophet: He declared them all hypocrites. They were all wrong and all their creeds were an abomination in his sight. Those professors were all corrupt. *They draw near unto me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me...having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof* (JS-H 2:19). There are those in the Church who would identify Zion with Executive Meadows, the exclusive condominium for the “right people.”

Over whom does the Priesthood exercise power then? Over the spirits and over the elements. Never over one’s fellowmen whose free agency is absolute and inalienable.

Christ commanded the spirits and they obeyed Him. He commanded the elements and they obeyed Him. But men He would not command, and He later rebuked the Apostles at

Capernaum for suggesting it *how often would I have gathered you together...and ye would not!*

Then what is the Priesthood on this earth? It is what Joseph Smith called “an onerous burden,” a load to be borne. Very few men on earth, including those in the Church, really are qualified. In terms of prestige, status, power, influence, pleasure, privilege, *power, and authority, and riches* (3 Nephi 6: 37) the Priesthood has absolutely nothing to offer. The world laughs at it, the Latter-day Saints abuse or ignore it, and those who take it seriously do so in *fear and trembling*.