

A New Emphasis on Priesthood

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My faith in youth is always renewed when I have the privilege of meeting with the youth of Zion.

I would like to talk to you today about a subject that makes no headlines in the media or gets much attention elsewhere. It is not a popular subject for speakers. In the gospel menu it would probably be the meat and potatoes instead of the exotic salads and other types of foods. I suppose for that reason it has normally been avoided as a subject for speakers. Yet this movement is the single most important event that has occurred in recent Church history. I speak of the present emphasis on the basic priesthood principles—the assignment of more specific priesthood duties to brethren, the reactivation of men who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, the motivation of men to worthily receive it, and the placing on women of more responsibility than ever before to assist the priesthood. Both the method and the objective of this great movement are to strengthen the home. Few things can strengthen the home as much as the achievement of this objective. This emphasis is a direct frontal attack on the influences that would destroy the home.

On all sides we hear concern expressed regarding problems that start in the home. The corollary to that, obviously, is to resolve them

in the home. In the world we are seldom told to do that; even less frequently are we told *how* to solve these problems. When we shall achieve the purposes of the present priesthood emphasis we shall have found the way to resolve the majority of these problems. The Lord, I believe, has comprehended this from the beginning, and I think we are just gradually beginning to learn it.

The Priesthood and Its Purpose

This priesthood emphasis, identified with the priesthood correlation program, is not entirely new to the Church, but seldom has it had the long-range planning and consideration it has had in recent times. The careful planning culminated in the announcement last year of greater emphasis on the priesthood. (I wish I could think of a better word to use, but it is not a program—it is not a system, and it is not a procedure. It is an *emphasis* on the priesthood.) Specifically, it is to reactivate elders and motivate prospective elders to become elders (these

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are the former Aaronic Priesthood adult brethren over the age of nineteen). It places greater emphasis upon the priesthood responsibility of all who bear the priesthood. Perhaps some background may help you to understand the priesthood and its purpose.

Attempting to define the priesthood, John Taylor said:

It is the government of God, whether on the earth or in the heavens, for it is by that power, agency, or principle that all things are governed on the earth and in the heavens, and by that power that all things are upheld and sustained. It governs all things—it directs all things—it sustains all things—and has to do with all things that God and truth are associated with. It is the power of God delegated to intelligences in the heavens and to man on the earth. [John Taylor in Millennial Star, 9:321, quoted in John A. Widtsoe, Priesthood and Church Government, p. 32; emphasis added]

To clarify the difference between priesthood and offices in the priesthood, President Joseph F. Smith said:

There is no office growing out of this Priesthood that is or can be greater than the Priesthood itself. It is from the Priesthood that the office derives its authority and power. No office gives authority to the Priesthood. No office adds to the power of the Priesthood. But all offices in the Church derive their power, their virtue, their authority, from the Priesthood. If our brethren would get this principle thoroughly established in their minds, there would be less misunderstanding in relation to the functions of government in the Church than there is. [Gospel Doctrine, p. 14; emphasis added]

Five years after the Church was organized with the first and second elders, the Lord gave a significant revelation on priesthood. He said, speaking of the presiding quorums of his Church and setting forth the order of the

priesthood in the government of the kingdom of God:

Of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church. [D&C 107:22]

Next is set forth the special calling of the Twelve:

The twelve traveling counselors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling.

And they form a quorum, equal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned [equal, that is, when there exists no First Presidency]. [D&C 107:23–24]

Next is set forth the unique calling of the Seventy, meaning the First Council of the Seventy:

The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling. [D&C 107:25]

Others have been called as General Authorities and assist the presiding brethren:

Whereas other officers of the church, who belong not unto the Twelve, neither to the Seventy, are not under the responsibility to travel among all nations, but are to travel as their circumstances shall allow, notwithstanding they may hold as high and responsible offices in the church. [D&C 107:98]

In other important priesthood revelations—sections 20, 42, 84, and 121—and in instructions from the Brethren today, the Lord has further

explained the duties of the various offices of the priesthood. The presiding function of high priests is set forth thus:

High priests after the order of the Melchizedek Priesthood have a right to officiate in their own standing, under the direction of the presidency, in administering spiritual things, and also in the office of an elder, priest . . . , teacher, deacon, and member. [D&C 107:10]

In addition, today, high priests are to sponsor genealogical research and temple attendance. There are just three great things that this church and the people are to do. One is to save the dead; the other is to perfect the Saints; and the other is to do missionary work—to declare the message of the restoration to all the world. These three major things have been assigned to the three major offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood. High priests have genealogical research and temple attendance. The elders' responsibility is set forth:

An elder has a right to officiate in his stead when the high priest is not present.

The high priest and elder are to administer in spiritual things, agreeable to the covenants and commandments of the church; and they have a right to officiate in all these offices of the church when there are no higher authorities present. [D&C 107:11–12]

Today elders have the major assignment to care for the temporal and spiritual welfare of each elder and prospective elder and their families. You may get some idea of the magnitude of their responsibility when you understand that the number of high priests and seventies is less than half the number of elders in a normal stake of Zion. Then when you add the prospective elders to their responsibility, their responsibility doubles again. This is the magnitude of their service.

The seventies have a special assignment to motivate missionary work through the

priesthood correlation program of the Church: “And these seventy are to be traveling ministers, unto the Gentiles first and also unto the Jews” (D&C 107:97).

The Aaronic Priesthood is to administer in temporal things and is a “preparatory priesthood.”

“Let Every Man Learn His Duty”

After delineating the duties of each office, the Lord declared: “Therefore, let every man stand in his own office, and labor in his own calling . . . that the system may be kept perfect” (D&C 84:109–10). And he said, to conclude the 107th section:

Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence.

He that is slothful shall not be counted worthy to stand, and he that learns not his duty and shows himself not approved shall not be counted worthy to stand. [D&C 107:99–100]

When we thoroughly understand our priesthood duties and act in them “in all diligence,” we shall then perform a mighty work. We are now involved in a way, the like of which I think this church has never seen before, with this particular emphasis. And we are meeting with success. Each week we go out to a conference and find stakes that are accomplishing only a little and stakes that, when they catch the vision and understanding, are accomplishing a tremendous amount. We shall likewise fulfill the prediction of President Joseph F. Smith, when we act in all diligence. He said:

We expect to see the day, if we live long enough, . . . when every council of the Priesthood in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will understand its duty, will assume its own responsibility, . . . to the uttermost, according to the intelligence and ability possessed by it. When that day shall come, there will not be so much necessity for work that is

now being done by the auxiliary organizations, because it will be done by the regular quorums of the Priesthood. The Lord designed and comprehended it from the beginning, and He has made provision in the Church whereby every need may be met and satisfied through the regular organizations of the Priesthood. [Conference Report, April 1906, p. 3]

This prophecy had a major fulfillment last November, when the MIA was made an arm of the priesthood.

The Man Must Lead His Family

The most important outcome of “acting in our calling in all diligence” is that we shall strengthen the home. May I suggest two of the significant implications as a man begins to magnify his priesthood. First, he will assume his rightful role as the head and spiritual leader in his home. Second, he will willingly perform outside his home that service required to magnify his office in the priesthood, that is, home teaching or service in some priesthood or auxiliary capacity. The Church has provided the means whereby the father may become the spiritual leader of the home by regularly holding a family home evening. The fulfillment of this calling tremendously magnifies a father and puts things in proper perspective—something every home needs, and something every father needs. His service outside the home affords him invaluable experience and properly magnifies him in the eyes of his fellowmen; such esteem from others every man also needs.

The man ought to be the spiritual leader of the home. When a man does not exercise the priesthood to the extent he is authorized to do so, and when he fails to act as the spiritual leader in his home, someone else does. While this condition may exist until he becomes the spiritual leader, “from the beginning it was not so.”

Orson Hyde expresses a thought-provoking assertion:

I will here venture the assertion, that no man can be exalted to a celestial glory in the kingdom of God whose wife rules over him; and as the man is not without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord, it follows as a matter of course, that the woman who rules over her husband, thereby deprives herself of a celestial glory. [Journal of Discourses, 4:258]

Anyone who has been through the temple should understand the proper role of the husband and the wife and consent to its being that way. The way to solve juvenile delinquency as well as a host of other social problems is to put father at the head of the family. The mother cannot put the father in his proper place; if she could, then she could remove him if occasion required. The man must step forward and assume his rightful role. He is to be the breadwinner. He is to take the lead. His role should be well understood by his children as well. In Ephesians we read some wise counsel:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

[Ephesians 5:22–25]

Our understanding of the role of husband and wife in an ideal home may not be sustained by some modern sociological concepts. Our understanding comes from revelations in both ancient and modern days.

There is widespread misunderstanding today concerning the role of father and mother and children. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that the destiny of the family is to live together as a family unit in the celestial

glory. To understand their proper roles, one must understand the eternal nature of man's life, his premortal existence, life's purpose now, and his future destiny.

The man is the head of the home. He is to preside and administer its affairs, not in a dictatorial or authoritarian manner, but "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge" (D&C 121:41–42). When he magnifies his office in the priesthood, he will begin to do this better.

The Woman's Exalted Role

President Reuben Clark, Jr., one of the Lord's noble servants, defined woman's role in eternal perspective. Speaking of Eve, he spoke of all women:

So came Eve, an helpmeet to the priesthood mission of Adam—Eve, the last created being in the . . . world. . . . Adam took her in her purity, . . . radiant and divinely fair, into the Garden he had dressed and kept for her, into the bridal home he had built, into the Garden that from then till now has been the symbol of heaven on earth, there to begin together their earthly life, that was finally to bring opportunity . . . to the untold myriads of spirits then waiting for the mortal tabernacles these two were to make it possible for them to possess.

. . . So Eve came . . . to be a creator of bodies . . . that God's design and the great plan might meet fruition.

This was her calling. . . .

From that day, . . . the greatest glory of true womanhood has been motherhood.

What a miracle is motherhood; how nearly infinite is mother. She fashions in her womb the most complex structure known to man. . . .

This is wife's and mother's task and opportunity; and did she fail . . . then the great plan would fail and God's purposes would come to naught. . . .

This must never change. . . .

But the full glory of motherhood is not yet reached when her child comes forth into this world

of trial. . . . She feeds not only, but clothes it. She cares for it by day and watches over it by night. . . . She gently leads its faltering steps, till it walks alone. . . .

Thus to the full stature of manhood and womanhood, mother guides, instructs, directs . . . the soul for which she built the earthly home, in its march onward to exaltation. God gives the soul its destiny, but mother leads it along the way.

When the souls shall return to the presence of the Father of all, the worthy mothers will be there to welcome their worthy children. [Immortality and Eternal Life, 2:24–28]

Wives and mothers do what men cannot do. Men will bow in reverence and in love before mothers who perform this great, this marvelous service.

Contrast this view of woman with the current prattle that demeans motherhood and her exalted role, that even condones abortion and its attendant evils, that sets aside the role God gave to her. It would be hard to imagine a more exalted role of woman and her place in the eternal plan than is held and taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And yet there are some within and without the Church who would change it. I admonish you today, both young and old, to read and listen and pray, to know the will of the Lord in this important matter, for it holds the key to your eternal happiness and destiny. The family is a divine institution. The first family unit was organized by our Heavenly Father:

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. [Genesis 2:18, 24]

The Lord has instructed his children in the basic family relationships:

Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else. [D&C 42:22]

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. [Colossians 3:19]

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. [Colossians 3:18]

Thou shalt live together in love. [D&C 42:45]

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. [Colossians 3:21]

Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. [Colossians 3:20]

The Home Must Be Filled with Love

The home is the source of happiness, serenity, and peace. Only in a home filled with unity and love can man or woman find the pure, undiluted heavenly joys. There is no substitute. An expression from one of the early apostles, Orson Pratt, gives us food for thought in his logical reasoning:

Could wicked and malicious beings, who have eradicated every feeling of love from their bosoms, be permitted to propagate their species, the offspring would partake of all the evil, wicked, and malicious nature of their parents. . . . It is for this reason that God will not permit the fallen angels to multiply: It is for this reason that God has ordained marriages for the righteous only: it is for this reason that God will put a final stop to the multiplication of the wicked after this life: it is for this reason that none but those who have kept the celestial law will be permitted to multiply after the resurrection: . . . for they alone are prepared to beget and bring forth offspring whose bodies and spirits, partaking of the nature of the parents, are pure and lovely, and will manifest, as they increase in years, those heaven-born excellencies so necessary to lead them to happiness and eternal life. [Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, pp.

156–57, quoted in Rodney Turner, *Woman and the Priesthood*, p. 147; cf. *Journal of Discourses*, 13:186]

In view of the wise counsel through revelation that we have received, why live the wrong way now? Why be guided by the philosophies of men in eternal living? Why confuse the roles of husband and wife and put in jeopardy the lives of your children?

Why should I talk about this matter to you young people this morning? You are not yet married. If this university fulfills its purpose, however, you soon will be. Now is the time to understand your place in life. Now is the time to prepare for your proper role in the Lord's plan. Now is the time to plan an enduring family unit, before you make any mistakes. If you are not yet married, these relationships still are important and one day will ultimately apply to every worthy soul.

Do you young ladies see and understand what this means in eternal perspective? When you marry, and if you marry, do you see why it ought to be to an active Latter-day Saint man who honors the priesthood? Do you young men see the importance of your present companionships being conducted purely and properly to prepare you to worthily enter the temple of the Lord to eternalize the family unit? Brigham Young said:

There is not a young man in our community who would not be willing to travel from here to England to be married right, if he understood things as they are; there is not a young woman in our community, who loves the gospel and wishes its blessings, that would be married in any other way; they would live unmarried until they could be married as they should be, if they lived until they were as old as Sarah before she had Isaac born to her. [Journal of Discourses, 11:118]

Do you see, in eternal perspective, the answer to such questions as personal purity,

parenthood, temple marriage, the priesthood? We have limited this consideration of the far-reaching effects of the present emphasis on priesthood to only two implications: the effect it can have on a father and mother, and on the home. That effect is tremendous.

President Harold B. Lee has said:

Now, you husbands, remember that the most important of the Lord's work that you will ever do will be the work you do within the walls of your own home. Home teaching, bishopric's work, and other Church duties are all important, but the most important work is within the walls of your home.

[From the published text of a 1973 motion picture, *Strengthening the Home*, p. 7]

Thank the Lord for revelation to his servants today. Living prophets give counsel to a living church. If you will listen and heed the counsel, you will live and live eternally. This counsel establishes your priorities. It puts things in proper perspective.

I bear you my humble witness that we do have the priesthood in this church. It has been given to us by angelic messengers who came from the presence of the Lord with it. We have a great emphasis being given to it in the Church today. May you understand it, be a part of it, and see its far-reaching implications for your well-being and eternal happiness, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.