

Scriptural Commentary

Priesthood

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In this issue of commentary we will discuss some interesting items pertaining to priesthood. Extracts have been chosen which might interest the reader to pursue the study personally.

Power in the Priesthood

Readers no doubt will be familiar with LDS terminology which sometimes speaks of those who have been given "priesthood authority" and distinguishes between the mere holders and those who are able to "exercise power in the priesthood." (For example see: "Put on Thy Strength O Zion," *Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide* 1982, p. 104).

In the First Manchester England Area Conference held 19 and 20 June 1976, President Spencer W. Kimball delivered some fascinating remarks on the literal power of the priesthood. In the course of his remarks he quotes Brigham Young's feelings as to the material and real sense of the priesthood. Their remarks follow:

Brethren, you hold the priesthood. I assume that all of you who are here today hold the priesthood, at least most of you. How grateful you should be to be able to hold the priesthood. What is the priesthood? It is the power of God delegated to man to act in his stead. That means he has just taken his power in large quantities and put in on our shoulders and said, "Now go forth and use it for good."

Few of us really realize the power of the priesthood, the power it has in the home, the power it has over the elements, the power it has everywhere we move. The reason it is not a greater power is because we sometimes do not respond to the point where we are worthy of that blessing.

It is strange that there are many people in the Church who, when there is distress—a broken limb or a sickness—call for the doctor. We are grateful to have such wonderful practitioners in our communities who can help us to find our way back to health, but Brigham Young gave us something regarding this. I would like to read a line or two from President Brigham Young. He said, "When I lay hands on the sick, I expect the healing power and influence of God to pass through me to the patient." Now if it is

not in me, how can it pass through to the patient? And how do we get it in us? We live worthy of it, and the Lord is anxious to see that we have it. Brigham Young said, "I do not say that I heal everybody I lay hands on; but many have been healed under my administration." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widstoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954], p. 162). . .

James E. Talmage, in acknowledging the injustice experienced or felt by some has written:

In the restored Church of Jesus Christ, the Holy Priesthood is conferred, as an individual bestowal, upon men only, and this in accordance with Divine requirement. It is not given to woman to exercise the authority of the Priesthood independently; nevertheless, in the sacred endowments associated with the ordinances pertaining to the House of the Lord, woman shares with man the blessings of the Priesthood. When the frailties and imperfections of mortality are left behind, in the glorified state of the blessed hereafter, husband and wife will administer in their respective stations, seeing and understanding alike, and co-operating to the full in the government of their family kingdom. Then shall woman be recompensed in rich measure for all the injustice that womanhood has endured in mortality. Then shall woman reign by Divine right, a queen in the resplendent realm of her glorified state, even as exalted man shall stand, priest and king unto the Most High God. Mortal eye cannot see nor mind comprehend the beauty, glory, and majesty of a righteous woman made perfect in the celestial kingdom of God (James E. Talmage, "The Eternity of Sex," *Young Woman's Journal* 25 [October 1914]:602-03).

Again, Brigham Young said, "Do you see the reason and propriety of laying hands on each other? When we are prepared, when we are holy vessels (I repeat that, holy vessels) before the Lord, a stream of power from the Almighty can pass through the tabernacle of the administrator to the system of the patient." (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 162.)

Women and the Priesthood

In October of 1852, Elder Ezra Taft Benson, an apostle of the Church, spoke during conference about the Devil, revelation, and modern priesthood. Among other things he commented about the sisters healing

through faith: "The Priests in Christendom warn their flocks not to believe in Mormonism; and yet you sisters have power to heal the sick, by the laying on of hands, which they cannot do." (*Millennial Star*, XV:130.)

In the early history of the Church it was common for Relief Society sisters to visit and administer relief to their kindred sisters, not through the priesthood but by virtue of their callings and faith.

Another saying which some sisters may enjoy placing next to their other "refrigerator slogans" is: "We have heard of men who have said to their wives, 'I hold the priesthood and you've got to do what I say.' Such a man should be tried for his membership. Certainly he should not be honored in his priesthood. We rule in love and understanding." (Spencer W. Kimball, *Buenos Aires Area Conference*, March 1975, pp. 52-53).

Women and the Patriarchal Priesthood

In a fuller and richer sense than is commonly thought by many within the Church women do share in the priesthood. This order of priesthood as taught by Joseph Smith is termed "patriarchal" and associated with the temple. Unfortunately some apostates have misunderstood this priesthood order which is a portion of the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God. Apostates have tended to think of it as a separate and higher form of priesthood authority which is not correct. (See: Ehat & Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* [Religious Studies Center, BYU: Provo, UT], 1980, discourse and footnotes for 27 August 1843.) Elder Bruce R. McConkie has stated:

We go to the temple and we get married for eternity, and when we do, we are given everything that Abraham received as far as the promises of glory and exaltation are concerned. . . .

Joseph Smith says that in the temple of God there is an order of priesthood that is patriarchal. 'Go to the temple,' he says, 'and find out about this order.' So I went to the temple, and I took my wife with me, and we knelt at the altar. There on that occasion we entered, the two of us, into an 'order of the priesthood.' When we did it, we had sealed upon us, on a conditional basis, every blessing that God promised Father Abraham—the blessings of exaltation and eternal increase. The name of that order of priesthood, which is patriarchal in nature, because Abraham was a natural patriarch to his posterity, is the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage." ("The Eternal Family Concept," *Genealogical Devotional Address*, 19-23 June 1967 [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1968], pp. 89-91.)