

7

AUTHORITY

The need for authority to act in any given capacity is recognized in all areas of life, especially in government. No man has the right to represent the government of any nation unless he has been given authority to do so. The way in which this authority is given is prescribed by a very definite process, step by step. The limitations upon this authority are clearly set forth that there might be no misunderstanding.

Isaiah, looking down the stream of time, said, "For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6). The prophet here is speaking concerning the government of the Kingdom of God. There are many today who will claim there is no need for authority when one ministers for Christ. But we believe it is necessary that men receive authority to act in this Kingdom of God plan—just as it is necessary to have authorized representatives in world government in order to avoid confusion.

Jesus warned of men who would act without authority. He said, "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name; and in thy name cast out devils; and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I say, Ye never knew me; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:32-33). He warned of men who would teach in His name but never knew Him at all. What of their followers? He speaks plainly, "But in vain do they worship me, teaching the doctrines and the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8). One outstanding difference between Christ and any other ministers was His authority. Matthew records, "The people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority from God, and not as having authority from the scribes" (Matthew 7:36-37).

The very term "minister" means servant, and the word "servant" implies recognition of a master. The minister then should truly be the servant of God. Paul refers to it in this way, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The Church of Jesus Christ by its very name proclaims that it does not belong to itself or exist for itself. The Church is the Church only in direct proportion as it is of Christ. The ministers of the Church are ministers only in proportion to their calling of God through Christ.

Authority of His ministers is further emphasized by Christ as He said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). It is important to know this, for it is by the same authority that Jesus was sent that He in turn sends others.

HOW AUTHORITY COMES TO MEN

There are many ideas about how authority is given men. Some believe it is the result of a feeling in one's heart. Some think of authority in terms of a theological diploma. We believe it must be revealed of God. Let us now search the Scriptures to see what the Lord reveals to us.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews says, "And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Hebrews 5:4). The emphasis here is that authority comes from God, and it comes to men in the specific manner in which it came to Aaron.

The manner of the calling of Aaron is clear: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, . . . Thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, . . . and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office" (Exodus 40:1, 12-13). God spoke to Moses, one having authority, and told him to ordain Aaron. It was not sufficient that Aaron felt some kind of call within him.

The Scriptures give evidence that this was true not only in the case of Aaron but also with the seventy (see Numbers 11:16-17) and with Joshua (see Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9). And as this was true in the days of Moses, we see that it was also true in the days of Christ and the apostles. In the calling of the original Twelve, we find that Jesus prayed all night on the mountain top; and "when it was day, he called his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles" (Luke 6:13). When Judas fell by transgression, there was need for another to take his

place. The remaining eleven turned to God, after consideration of men whom they felt should be worthy witnesses, and asked, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou has chosen" (Acts 1:24). At a later date, we are told that the Holy Ghost spake unto the prophets and teachers at Antioch and said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). The next chapter tells us these men were called apostles (see Acts 14:14).

The above examples give evidence of what is meant by being "called of God as was Aaron." From the beginning of the Restoration, this pattern has been followed. God calls men today as He called Aaron of old.

WHAT IS PRIESTHOOD?

We have indicated that authority is connected with that which we know as priesthood. So it is logical to ask, "What is priesthood?" We believe that priesthood is the authority and power from God delegated to man to officiate in all things pertaining to the gospel and the building up of the Kingdom of God on earth. Priesthood is unchangeable and eternal.

In order for men to possess this priesthood, they must obey the requirements of God's laws, be legally ordained according to the will of God, and continue to walk in newness of life. The authority of priesthood must be possessed jointly with the power of God if we are to accomplish His will. Authority without power is of no use. The power of God of which we speak is manifested in faith, love, truth, mercy, justice, and judgment. Where these attributes exist along *with* authority, there is power to preach the gospel and administer the ordinances in God's Kingdom.

DIVISIONS AND OFFICES

There is one priesthood. It comes from God through Jesus Christ. By the nature of the needs of man and the Church, there are many specialized functions in this priesthood. As Paul called the Church "the body of Christ," we see the analogy. In the human body we have a number of organs we call "vital organs." Of these, there are some which are respiratory and some which are digestive. These sustain the very life of man. There are, however, other parts of the body, such as legs and arms which give us the ability to move and draw things to us. These are called appendages. We see that there is a division as to vital organs and appendages as well as divisions within these divisions. All of this is for the sake of specialized function.

So also is the priesthood of God. There are two main divisions or orders, which the Scriptures call "Melchisedec" and "Aaronic" (Hebrews 7:11). Within these orders are other divisions which we recognize as offices of priesthood. Let it be clear: There is one priesthood. Though the functions of orders and offices differ, all are of God.

Note the distinction between priesthood authority and priesthood office. "Authority" comes to a man with his ordination. It is something which he holds within himself. It empowers him to act for God. It becomes part of his life, and he cannot be separated from it except as he may become disqualified by transgression. "Office" indicates the specific area of his service. This may be changed from time to time as God wills. Sometimes, because of disability, a man may be released from his office and still retain the authority of his priesthood.

Charles Fry in *The Nature of Priesthood* says, "When a member of the priesthood dies, he leaves the office; but he carries his authority with him." Office is a designated area of service in which a priesthood member is placed to labor. Priesthood authority is the essential gift of God, empowering man to act in the office to which he has been appointed. Ordination gives authority, which connects man with the source of the power of Christ. Office is the area in which he puts that power to work. Priesthood is a means of receiving; office is the opportunity of giving to others that which God desires them to receive.

The Aaronic priesthood includes the function of the Levitical priesthood (see D&C 104:1a). The Melchisedec priesthood has power and authority to "administer in spiritual things" (see D&C 104:3b), and the Aaronic "has power in administering outward ordinances" (D&C 104:8b).

These same functions were true in the time of Moses. He was given spiritual authority and responsibility over the people. He was later commanded of God to share this responsibility with

the seventy: “And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders; and it came to pass that, when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied and did not cease” (Numbers 11:25). Aaron, his sons, and the Levites had charge of the sanctuary, even in the sense of physical protection (see Numbers 3:32, 38). The sanctuary was the place where the “outward ordinances” were administered.

HOW AUTHORITY IS CONFERRED

The Scriptures indicate the bestowal of priesthood authority came by the laying on of hands. In the case of Timothy, Paul admonishes, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (1 Timothy 4:14). In modern-day revelation we also find this: “Every elder, priest, teacher, or deacon . . . is to be ordained by the power of the Holy Ghost which is in the one who ordains him” (D&C 17:12). That is what was meant when the Lord commanded Moses to “put some of thine honor” upon Joshua (Numbers 27:20). Thus we see that it is not only the laying on of hands that constitutes a legal ordination but the power of God which is in the one who officiates.

RESTORATION

Because the children of Israel hardened their hearts against the Lord, “Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst and the holy priesthood also; and the lesser priesthood continued” (D&C 83:4c). Through the Restoration the power of priesthood was restored to earth again. John the Baptist ordered the Aaronic priesthood in the ordination of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and the Melchisedec priesthood was conferred on Joseph and Oliver when the Church was organized.

This authority should be respected, cherished, and held sacred by both those having it and those who do not. The Lord has said: “If my people will respect the officers whom I have called and set in the church, I will respect these officers; and if they do not, they cannot expect the riches of gifts and the blessings of direction” (D&C 125:14c). In humility and love, out of a compassion for souls, this authority should be used to build up the Kingdom of God and establish His righteousness.

Questions for Discussion

6. What is priesthood? What two priesthoods are found in Christ’s Church?
2. How was Aaron called? Why?
3. Give an example of the calling and ordaining of a man in the New Testament Church.
4. Is the setting apart in a priestly office the same as bestowing authority? What gives a man authority?
7. How did Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery receive the Aaronic priesthood?
6. What is the difference in authority between the Aaronic and Melchisedec orders? What is the difference in function?
7. What had the four sons of Mosiah done to make it possible for them to teach with power and authority from God?
8. What priesthood office did Christ hold? Give scriptural proof.
9. When a member of the priesthood dies, does he lose his priesthood office and/or authority?

8. Why is authority necessary in the Church for the building of lives and God's Kingdom?