

Father to Son: A Dialogue on Priesthood

By Chauncey C. Riddle

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S. Dad, the bishop talked with me this morning about receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood. He said that one of the things I should do is talk to you about what it really means to have the priesthood.

Father. I'm grateful the bishop gave you that assignment, Paul, because priesthood is very special to me. We have discussed the priesthood many times before, so where would you like to begin? Do you have some special questions?

S. Let's pretend I have never heard about priesthood before. Could I ask you some basic questions to help me see the whole picture at once?

F. Fire away.

S. First of all, what is it?

F. Simply stated, priesthood is the delegated power and authority to represent Jesus Christ.

S. But why Jesus? Why don't we represent our Father in heaven?

F. Are you thinking about the fact that all human beings are children of God the Father?

S. Yes. And so is Jesus.

F. That is true, but there is something different about our Savior. He was our eldest brother when we lived with our Heavenly Father. Then he was given a very special assignment. He was chosen by the Father to organize this earth, to people it with others of the Father's children, to govern it, and to bless, through the atonement, each person who would come here. The rest of us didn't get that assignment; it was a stewardship given to one person only.

S. You don't mean that he has to do all those things all by himself!

F. No, indeed. He has many who help him, and that is precisely where priesthood comes in. But the Savior is the head. He is the one to whom the Father has given total responsibility for this earth and all things that pertain to it. The Father so loved us that he sent Jesus to create this world, then sent him into this world to suffer and die that he might save us.

S. But why was Jesus chosen to be that one, the Savior?

F. I'm sure I don't know all the reasons, but one I do believe: I think the Father chose Jesus to represent him because of the great and pure love that Jesus had in the premortal existence. Jesus loved the Father and obeyed him in all things. But he also had a pure love for others, for us. Because Jesus' love was pure, with no shred of selfishness or self-seeking in it, the Father knew he could trust Jesus to be solely responsible for this earth.

S. Didn't anyone else have that pure love?

F. My guess is that there were others. But the Father's house is a house of order. He appointed one only to be the head. When he, the Father, speaks to men, he has only one thing to say to them at first. He says to men, "This is my beloved son. Hear him?" ([JS—H 1:17](#)); see also, e.g., [Matt. 3:17](#), [Matt. 17:5](#).) Those who keep that commandment can receive all blessings on earth and in heaven through him, through Jesus Christ. Thus the Savior has become the great High Priest, the only source of the blessings of the Father for this earth. When we receive the priesthood it is the Savior's authority we receive. That's why it is called "The Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God." (See [D&C 107:3](#).)

S. I can see why there should be only one person to represent the Father. But I'm still worried about all the other people who also had, or have, great love for the Father and for others. What happens to them?

F. I believe that many of those who also have that pure love are the noble and great ones that father Abraham mentioned. The Savior makes them his rulers on earth. (See [Abr. 3:22–23](#).)

S. That's kind of hard to believe when you look at some rulers during the different dispensations of time.

F. Indeed, if you look at most temporal rulers. The scriptures aren't talking about kings, generals, and presidents, however. The Savior's rulers are those whom he appoints to transmit the blessings of eternity to their fellowmen. They are the bearers of his priesthood.

S. You are saying that the Savior chooses out of the people of this earth certain ones of those who have pure love and gives them his priesthood so they can bless others? That sounds good, but I have a hard time relating that idea to what I see in the Church. I see some good people who have the priesthood. But I also see some others who don't seem to have much love for anybody, let alone pure love.

F. 'Tis high to be a judge, Paul. But I agree with you. We can't honestly say that everyone who has been ordained to the priesthood is what he ought to be.

S. The way you are describing it, it sounds as if a person would have to be perfect to exercise the Savior's priesthood fully.

F. Scary though it sounds, that is very near to the truth as I understand it. When the Savior was telling his disciples in Judea about what is expected of us, they began to despair and asked, "Who, then, can be saved?" His answer is the only hope; he told them that with man, such perfection is impossible, but that with God all good things are possible. (See [Matt. 19:23–26](#).) Does that answer make sense to you?

S. I guess that means men can't be perfect unless God helps them.

F. Right! That is part of what the scriptures mean when they say we are saved by grace—but only after we do all we can. (See [2 Ne. 25:23](#).)

S. I hate to be pessimistic, but I still can't believe that most of the people I know in the priesthood have a perfect love.

F. Paul, the thing that is remarkable is not that some people don't have that perfect love: the miracle is that some do. It helps if we separate beginnings and endings.

The beginning is that no human being as he is naturally upon the earth is smart enough or good enough to represent the Savior

perfectly and show forth the pure love in blessing others. So there needs to be a process of enlarging and purifying someone who is to represent the Savior.

The beginning of that process is accepting the gospel; we must confess our weakness and covenant with the Savior in baptism to take upon us his name, to remember him always, and to obey all the instructions he gives to us. Those are the promises you priests repeat every time you consecrate the bread in the administration of the sacrament.

S. Yes, I remember those ideas. But are promises enough?

F. Not enough, but the necessary beginning. When we make those promises at baptism we are then given the blessing of having, and the commandment to receive, the Holy Ghost.

S. When we are confirmed?

F. Right. The privilege of having the Holy Ghost is one of the most marvelous things any person can have, for that influence teaches us how to begin to think and feel as the Savior does, and brings us instruction from the Savior. You remember that John the Baptist baptized with water. But he knew that the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost that the Savior would bring was so much greater that he felt he was not worthy to untie the Savior's shoes. It is the transforming power of the Holy Ghost that helps us to change so that we can be worthy and honorable bearers of the holy priesthood.

S. How does the Aaronic Priesthood fit into this?

F. Just as John came baptizing with water to prepare disciples whom the Savior could then baptize with the Holy Ghost, so the Aaronic Priesthood is given as a preparation for receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood. You learned as a deacon to pass the sacrament and to collect fast offerings. As a teacher you began home teaching. As a priest you have been privileged to consecrate the emblems of the sacrament and to begin missionary work and perform baptisms. All this time you have worked with the bishop in projects around the chapel, on the welfare farm, and in helping people in the wards. Now which of the fellows your age are being given the Melchizedek Priesthood?

S. Right now it's the ones who have done a good job as priests.

F. Sure. If a young man has learned to be diligent, faithful, and obedient in temporal matters, that is a marvelous preparation to become a minister in spiritual things. When he goes on his mission at age nineteen he is already a veteran in the service of our Savior. The attitudes and habits that a faithful priest has are his foundation for all of the callings of the higher priesthood. If he has learned to work under the authority of the priesthood in the Church and to live by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, then he is ready to do the work of love. Make no mistake, Paul: whether you serve as a missionary, as a worker in the Church organizations, or as a husband and father, your real success in these priesthood callings will be measured by the depth and purity of your selfless love and concern for others.

S. Are you saying that it's difficult to show your love for others if you have never learned to be orderly and efficient in temporal things?

F. I am indeed. A missionary who is lazy or unkempt or disobedient has a hard time convincing people that the restored gospel is something special.

An elders quorum president who never keeps track of anything has a difficult time motivating anyone to excel. A husband who won't work hard to provide for his family or who thinks first of his own pleasure is surely not going to lead his family to the Savior.

S. I can see how all these things as functions of the Aaronic Priesthood are good. But there's got to be more to it than that.

F. And there is. We have been talking only about the foundation of pure love. We must add to that foundation great knowledge, skill, wisdom, and the ability to understand people and their needs. These things are all gifts of the Spirit. Those who repent of their sins and who then hunger and thirst to bless others are filled with the Holy Ghost. Then those gifts begin to flow to them.

Let's look at a precious scripture, Paul. Could you turn to Doctrine and Covenants 121? The part from verse 34 to the end is so important that I think every bearer of the priesthood would do well to commit it to memory, word perfect, and repeat it to himself often. [[D&C 121:34-46](#)]

Notice verses 34 and 40. [[D&C 121:34, 40](#)] We are told that many are called but few are chosen—and why? Verse 35 tells us we must not be turned aside by desires for things of the world or the honors of men. Our objective in the priesthood should be to serve and to bless.

Verse 36 [[D&C 121:36](#)] shows us that we cannot use the priesthood except by the powers of heaven; specifically I understand that to mean that we must have the Holy Spirit with us to exercise the priesthood. It says further that we can't have the powers and gifts of the Spirit unless we are living righteously.

Verse 37 [[D&C 121:37](#)] tells us that if we let the things of the world turn us aside, the Holy Spirit will withdraw from us, and when it is gone, our power in the priesthood is gone. We must be honest, true, chaste, benevolent—all the good things—to use the priesthood power properly and righteously.

Verse 38 [[D&C 121:38](#)] recounts how people who won't repent are disappointed in their priesthood opportunities. Then they turn and fight the priesthood.

Verse 39 [[D&C 121:39](#)] witnesses that most people who receive the priesthood try to use it by force and domination instead of out of purity and love.

Now I hope you see that verse 40 [[D&C 121:40](#)] answers the question you had about brethren of the priesthood who don't seem to manifest much love. They have been given the opportunity to repent and do the works of love, but most people who are ordained to the priesthood—as it says here, “called”—do not rise to the occasion. Thus, few are chosen; few will have that priesthood eternally.

You see, we don't accept the gospel and come into the Savior's church because we are perfect, but rather that we may become perfect. We don't receive the priesthood because we are like the Savior, but so that through doing his work, we may grow to be as he is. In his great love he labors with us, helping us grow step by step, calling by calling in the kingdom. I'm sure he sorrows when those who bear his priesthood turn away and value the things of the world more than eternal life.

Now do you see why I said that there is a difference between beginnings and endings? All of us are unworthy in the beginning, but some grow to be worthy of it in the end.

S. Dad, I want to serve the Savior and to bless others. What can I do to be sure that I won't turn away?

F. The best that I know, Paul, is to plead with the Lord every day for help, then to hold fast to the iron rod. (See [1 Ne. 15:23–25](#).) I suppose the biggest temptation we have is just to let go of the rod, to take a vacation from righteousness. I think it helps to focus on the positive side. If we keep in mind what we can do and should do, that makes Satan's temptations less alluring. Notice Doctrine and Covenants 121, verses 41 and 42. [[D&C 121:41–42](#)] We are to use our priesthood "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, by love unfeigned; by kindness and pure knowledge." If we looked at ourselves in the mirror every morning and let those words pass through our minds, perhaps we would become like Nephi of old and tremble at the very thought of sinning.

S. Isn't it discouraging, thinking how good we have to be?

F. It could be. And I get discouraged sometimes. But I am spurred on by things I can hope for. Hand me that Inspired Version of the Bible, Paul. Notice here in Genesis 14 [[Gen. 14](#)] what it says about Melchizedek and the priesthood. If we are willing to press on, we are promised that when we are faithful and it is right to do so, we will be able to divide seas, to break mountains, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God. I long to be able to heal the sick, to bless those who mourn, to lead Mother and all of you children to the Savior. I long to live in a Zion where the Savior will rule personally and all will know him. But I know that these good things can be only as we learn to exercise the holy priesthood in the full power of righteousness. Then we can fulfill the promises of the Lord in that beautiful passage in Mosiah 8: "Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings." ([Mosiah 8:18](#).)

S. I hope we can do it, Dad.

F. We can if we stick together and reinforce each other, Paul. The greatest thing in my life has been the unfolding of the understanding I have of the goodness of the Savior to us. Most of that has come since I received the priesthood and began to serve in the Church. I'm so thankful for the special people who have stood at the crossroads of my life and taught me of the love of the Savior.

S. Who were they?

F. There were several, but let me mention three in particular.

One was my deacons quorum adviser. He taught us deacons much about the gospel. I can still see him sitting on the little chairs of the Junior Sunday School room, with tears streaming down his face as he told us about the atonement and how the Savior loved the Father and us enough to be perfect.

Another was the stake high councilor who worked with me when I was a struggling student and elders quorum president. He taught me to love the words of the prophets and to know how to live by the Spirit. He was also the stake patriarch. He gave me a blessing that has strengthened and guided me ever since.

The third person has had the most profound effect of all. That person is your mother, Paul. When we were married in the temple we were babes in the woods. We often laugh now at how naive and innocent of understanding we were. But we began to grow together. We read the scriptures together. We worked in the Church together. We suffered and we scrimped and saved together. Sometimes we were hard on each other because we were afraid. But one of the great blessings of my life has been your mother's love for me, Paul. That has given me courage and strength and has taught me what love is truly all about.

The people who have helped me have shown me that we need each other. My guess is that we can become like the Savior only by working together so that we grow together in his likeness.

S. I hope I can work with people who love the Lord.

F. The most precious opportunity you will have to do that will be in your marriage, Paul. All of the functions and purposes of marriage and family are connected inseparably with the operations and authority of the holy priesthood. If you do what you know you should, you and your wife will build an eternal priesthood kingdom in which to bless your own posterity forever.

I hope you will seek out one of our Father's daughters who is strong in the faith and is willing to grow in spirituality. Your temple marriage will give you a priesthood opportunity as big and as wide as eternity. If you and your wife can learn to love each other and your children purely and selflessly in the gospel bonds, you will come to know that joy for which man was created.

S. Dad, I'm grateful for this understanding.

F. If you can stand one more idea, Paul, please consider this: The people whom you will be called to serve on your mission or in the Church already exist. Your wife is somewhere, known or unknown to you now. The children you will have already exist, somewhere. I think the important things are to love and bless all of these people now. Don't wait until you are called or married. If you can love them now, you will keep yourself clean and you will be striving to grow in love for the Savior, in spirituality, and in righteousness. Then when your callings come, you will be ready to bless, to love with a pure love. Would you turn to the fifteenth chapter of John and read verses 5 through 12? [[John 15:5–12](#)]

S. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

"If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”

[photos] Photography by Eldon Linschoten

Notes

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