

# 19 Sustaining the Priesthood

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In the deepest layers of Catholicism, the Pope is considered infallible on certain issues. So much so, that when he makes a pronouncement on these issues, that statement supersedes anything that was previously established and accepted in the canon of belief. Many Latter-day Saints, because of *tradition*, labor under the assumption that latter-day church leaders are *infallible* no matter what they may say or teach. Consequently, some feel that if a priesthood leader or general authority says something that conflicts with scripture, then the words of the priesthood leader, like the Pope, are more binding and correct. Latter-day Saints are taught, and rightly so, that the prophet and president of the church will never be allowed by God to lead the church astray. However, this *divine default* refers *only* to the prophet and president of the church, not any other general authorities or local priesthood leadership. No doubt this Godly default is true, because in D&C 107:21-32, the Lord set up a system of checks and balances within the presiding priesthood organizations to maintain the purity of administration.

The church and priesthood leadership is led by the prophet and a quorum that functions as the Presidency of the Melchizedek Priesthood to ensure there will be no mistake in the *direction* of the Church. Mistakenly, many believe that every general authority will never say anything that might be wrong or untrue. Seldom do the priesthood leaders teach anything that would step beyond the inspired council that leads to a better understanding of the gospel and a Christ- like character change. But occasionally today, and especially in times past, leaders have been known to offer their personal commentary or opinions on scripture or doctrines that, filtered by their education and understanding, may or may not be correct. Many of the questions causing members to lose faith are based on statements or teachings arising from the *opinions* of current or past priesthood leaders. When a testimony is securely founded in Jesus Christ, and *not* the organization of administration, the contradictions and differing opinions and interpretations about scripture, science or any other subject, by any *local or general* priesthood leader, should not threaten one's faith or testimony. The obligation of the member is to determine if the statements made by the leadership are directed by the spirit and agree with the *standards* of the scripture, the words of Joseph Smith, and the statements of living prophets given to the church.

## A Standard

So, what is the standard of truth? As discussed earlier: if there is no standard then anything goes; everything could be correct, and everything may be wrong at the same time. The scriptures counsel to "trust not in the arm of flesh" and to trust in the doctrine of no man. This would seem to include one's teachers, professors, lawyers, politicians, and even our personal opinions. Yet a standard must be chosen, and in the Lord's church, *scripture is the standard by which all doctrine should be determined and the standard by which all truth should be judged*. To this end, the scriptures have been designated as the 'Standard Works' from which to determine true doctrine, containing the necessary principles and doctrines of salvation and exaltation. The quality of intelligence and truth that one may have is dependent upon the source chosen to be that standard of truth. The individual cannot be any smarter than the source that is believed, and if that source is one's self, failure is assured. The one who recognizes their own nothingness before God and continues to

seek for light and truth will receive the witness and revelation—not the one who believes they already know.

The educated atheist might only believe in that which they have experienced, thinking if it has not happened to them, it can not happen to anyone else. To the learned, the spiritual experience of a believer is defined as nothing more than an emotional situation. The line is thin between emotion and a spiritual experience. Nevertheless, there is a line. There is a difference. A beautiful piano concerto to one may invoke an emotion so strong that tears form, not only in the eyes, but in the spirit also. Yet to another person, the same music may be a chaotic pounding on the keys of a piano, creating emotions of anger and distress. The latter could claim that beautiful music doesn't exist and can't exist, because he hasn't yet experienced it. The educated fool might believe there can be no life after death, because it has not been experienced personally, nor have they known anyone who has come back from the dead (nor do they believe the *scriptural reports and testimonies of others*). This logic is as foolish as if one were to say that the land of Australia can't exist because they haven't ever seen it with their own eyes. Of course, even a home-bound person might have confidence that Australia does exist because of the *special reports and testimonies* of others they feel are trustworthy.

Korihor, a man of education and letters, had great success convincing the followers of God that they were duped using the logic and understanding of his own mind to judge spiritual matters:

12 And this Anti-Christ, whose name was Korihor, (and the law could have no hold upon him) began to preach unto the people that there should be no Christ. And after this manner did he preach, saying:

13 O ye that are bound down under a foolish and a vain hope, why do ye yoke yourselves with such foolish things? Why do ye look for a Christ? For no man can know of anything which is to come.

14 Behold, these things which ye call prophecies, which ye say are handed down by holy prophets, behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers.

15 How do ye know of their surety? Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see; therefore, ye cannot know that there shall be a Christ.

16 Ye look forward and say that ye see a remission of your sins. But behold, it is the effect of a frenzied mind; and this derangement of your minds comes because of the traditions of your fathers, which lead you away into a belief of things which are not so.

17 And many more such things did he say unto them, telling them that there could be no Atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore, every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength; and whatsoever a man did was no crime.

18 And thus he did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many women, and also men, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof. (Alma 30:12-18)

In Korihor's limited spiritual experience (and pride), he sought to become the source of the spiritual knowledge, testimony, and experience for others. Korihor felt that he was not only qualified to know for himself, but also to know and judge the spiritual experiences of everyone else. Korihor, like many detractors today, began to trust in his own flesh, his own learning and his own

experiences. Convinced he was right, and perhaps reveling in the power and influence his words had over others, he sought to destroy their testimonies using his gift for argument and logic. Notice: In the verses above Korihor first intellectually attacks the spiritual experiences of the believer, and then attacks the organized church and priesthood.

Like many today who discount faith and testimony based on spiritual manifestations, Korihor had no use for scriptures or the testimony of others, or for any beliefs that were not 'provable' according to the standards of men. Accordingly, many of those who have become the prey and victims of modern Korihors become so spiritually blunted that past experiences—spiritual truths they once knew—are lost to them. In that state spiritual darkness, they begin to believe they are enlightened and free from the shackles of faith and religion. As they begin trusting in the arm of flesh, they come to believe that their lack of faith and belief is a result of superior education, knowledge and experience, which is directly out of the Korihorian Encyclopedia of Faith and Religion. In their pride they are essentially saying they know more about faith and testimony than the generations who gave their whole life for their faith and their God. To justify their disbelief, they insinuate that parents and family are the ignorant and uneducated ones who have been manipulated and brainwashed by emotion and church leaders.

### **Fruits of Faith**

Those who are struggling with their faith might consider what their life and family might be like now if the three generations previous to them had no faith and no belief. What if their fathers, grand and great, had felt the same as they do? There would be no commandments to shackle physical desires as one begins to make choices that create character. There might be no moral code or restrictive morality; families might not be important or even necessary. Those falling away today might not even exist because of the pro-choice agenda. Imagine the generational trajectory of a family whose values went no deeper than "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die". The fruits of Joseph Smith are the members of the church today; not so much who they are or how many there are, but what they are. This alone should be a spiritual witness of the reality of God and goodness, of faith and family. Only a fool would declare that the absence of a faith in God and morality is the better way.

Korihor, trusting in his own arm of flesh, became the epitome of pride and selfishness. In his arrogance, the anti-Christ then demanded a sign:

43 And now Korihor said unto Alma: If thou wilt show me a sign, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, show unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words.

44 But Alma said unto him: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator. (Alma 30:43-44)

Oh, say what is truth? This is a question that is best answered in the scriptures and reinforced by the witnesses of prophets and apostles. The need to understand the scriptures in order to understand

doctrine has taken a secondary position, leading to the teaching of traditions and opinions as doctrine. This is not the fault of the church, as the manuals are based on the scriptures, and are intended to help members of the church begin the process that will bring them to Christ and initiate that change of character. Printed in the introduction of each manual is the instruction that it should be used as an aid in teaching or studying the scriptures. However, the prepared lesson material and sometimes the teacher's traditions often supersede the importance of the scriptures, in the classroom **and** from the pulpit. Seldom are the scriptures, or a passage or topic from the scriptures, used as a primary source for a talk. It is much easier to use church magazines or a conference talk as the first choice and major source. This is not bad or wrong, but because of this, the scriptures have migrated to a lesser position, often taking a back seat in the teaching, learning, and discovery of truth and doctrine. In consequence of this, disputes, arguments and rationalizations for a lack of faith are often focused on what someone in a position of authority has said, right or wrong, rather than on the doctrines and truths found in the scriptures. Of course, one must read and study the scriptures to know what truths they contain.

Scripture is the standard by which all doctrine should be determined, by member and priesthood leader alike. They are the standard by which all truth should be judged. It follows then that all opinions, interpretations and statements of the General Authorities, in General Conference or any other setting, should *square with the scriptures*.

Below are a few statements about the importance of scripture that should be remembered as one weighs the statements of past or present priesthood leaders. Notice that all doctrine must be founded upon the four standard works. Joseph Smith implied the same in a statement about the importance of scripture and his opinion:

If any man will prove to me, by one passage of Holy Writ, one item I believe to be false, I will renounce and disclaim it as far as I promulgated it. (*TPJS*, p 327)

Joseph Fielding Smith explained that the teachings and statements of all, including the leading brethren, should agree with the scriptures:

It makes no difference what is written or what anyone has said, if what has been said is in conflict with what the Lord has revealed, we can set it aside. My words, and the teaching of any other member of the church, high or low, *if they do not square with the revelations, we need not accept them*. Let us have this matter clear. We have accepted *the four standard works as the measuring yardsticks, or balances, by which we measure every man's doctrine*. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol.3, p.203)

President Harold B. Lee echoed the same as he emphasized the importance of scripture:

We have the standard church works. Why do we call them standard? If there is any teacher who teaches a doctrine that can't be substantiated from the standard church works—and I make one qualification, and that is unless that one be the president of the church, who alone has the right to declare new doctrine—then you may know by that same token that such a teacher is but expressing his own opinion. (*Stand Ye In Holy Places*, p.109-110)

Notice the one qualification to scripture that President Lee mentions: The president of the church “alone, has the right to declare new doctrine” or change doctrine—not his counselors, nor any of the twelve apostles. If the president of the church declares new doctrine or makes a change of existing doctrine, it must be made by *revelation* and then canonized by *declaration*.

A “declaration” of *new* doctrine or a *change* of doctrine will require the church as a body to first sustain the president of the church as a prophet, seer, and revelator. Following the sustaining vote, the new revelation or doctrine (or the change in old doctrine) will be read to the church. The body of the church then, by show of hand, accepts and sustains the revelation as the mind and will of the Lord, as all things must be done by common consent according to scripture. Remember, it is only the president of the church who has the right to declare or change doctrine.

- *Revelations* are scripture if canonized by official declaration.
- *Declarations* are those which change scripture or add new revelation to the standard works.
- *Proclamations* are official statements that explain church position, policy and doctrine that is based on existing scripture.

The scriptures, then, are binding. As the supreme standard of truth, the doctrines and principles that the prophets and the apostles teach must agree with those found in the scriptures. Scriptures are called “The Standard Works” for a reason. This idea of a “standard” that is unchangeable will be expanded upon in the first chapter of Part II.

The general leadership should rely on scripture as their standard both when speaking to the church membership and when discharging their responsibility to administer the gospel. On all other subjects, the priesthood leadership may have their opinions, filtered by their own education and learning. Thus, a prophet may speak as a prophet when required by ecclesiastical responsibility, and still voice an opinion as any man on other subjects that would not necessarily be binding on the general membership. Joseph Smith took pains to make the following distinction clear:

“This morning I read German and visited with a brother and sister from Michigan who ‘thought a prophet is always a prophet.’ But I told them that “*a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such.*” (TPJS page 278)

Below are a few references and quotes about the statements and teachings of priesthood leadership:

George Q. Cannon, Member of the First Presidency stated:

The First Presidency cannot claim, individually or collectively, infallibility.<sup>1</sup>

J. Reuben Clark, Member of the First Presidency made the comment about the fallibility of leaders:

Even the president of the church has not always spoken under the direction of the Holy Ghost.<sup>2</sup>

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1. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, 1957, 1:206

2. Elder J. Reuben Clark, quoted in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, p. 82

Spencer W. Kimball, President of the Church stated:

I make no claim of infallibility.<sup>3</sup>

In 2007 a published statement by the church on Mormon doctrine was made available to all:

Not every statement made by a church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole church. With divine inspiration, the First Presidency (the prophet and his two counselors) and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (the second-highest governing body of the church) counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official church publications. This doctrine resides in the four “standard works” of scripture (the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price), official declarations and proclamations, and the Articles of Faith. Isolated statements are often taken out of context, leaving their original meaning distorted. (LDS Newsroom, “Approaching Mormon Doctrine”)

In the October 2013 General Conference Elder Uchtdorf, a counselor in the First Presidency made this statement about the leaders and the mistakes of imperfect people:

And, to be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or leaders in the church have simply made mistakes. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine.

It is unfortunate that some have stumbled because of mistakes made by men. But in spite of this, the eternal truth of the restored gospel found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not tarnished, diminished, or destroyed.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and as one who has seen firsthand the councils and workings of this church, I bear solemn witness that no decision of significance affecting this church or its members is ever made without earnestly seeking the inspiration, guidance, and approbation of our Eternal Father. This is the church of Jesus Christ. God will not allow His church to drift from its appointed course or fail to fulfill its divine destiny.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of these public disclaimers from the pulpit, many members still expect infallibility from their leaders. The belief of infallibility may stem from years of sustaining the leaders as prophets, seers, and revelators. The nonverbal and subconscious implication is: as “prophets, seers, and revelators” the leaders cannot say or do anything wrong. Another contributing factor is the conditioning to be obedient to the voice of leadership. Members of the church are taught to follow the leaders, as they will not lead you astray. It is true, they do not and will not intentionally lead the members in a wrong direction or down the wrong path. Still, in the belief that obedience (The first law of heaven) is better than questioning, it is considered a *sin* to turn down a calling despite personal circumstance. To some, the act of sustaining implies that these leaders are *always* inspired, and all words they speak are given them directly from God. This position foolishly and unrealistically presupposes that these priesthood leaders no longer have *their* own personal interpretations, opinions, or traditions, and that their word and will is always the same as God’s. The leadership’s responsibility is the ministry and the administration of the gospel, that the

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3. Spencer W. Kimball, “Improvement Era,” June 1970, p. 9

4. 2013 October Conference, p 21, “Come Join with Us”

individual may come unto Christ. Priesthood leaders are not commissioned to provide scriptural commentary or an unfettered oration on the mysteries.

This practice of the improper faith and confidence in priesthood leaders worried Brigham Young:

I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not.<sup>5</sup>

In a letter for the Millennial Star in 1887, B. H. Roberts made a statement that addresses the fallibility of individual views:

Relative to these sermons [Journal of Discourses] I must tell you they represent the individual views of the speakers, and the church is not responsible for their teachings. Our authorized church works are the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. In the church very wide latitude is given to individual belief and opinion, each man being responsible for his views and not the church; the church is only responsible for that which she sanctions and approves through the formal actions of her councils. So it may be that errors will be found in the sermons of men, and that in their over zeal, unwise expressions will escape them, for all of which the church is not responsible.<sup>6</sup>

All leaders speak, make decisions, and take actions based on *their learning* and understanding of all subjects, including the meaning of scripture. While they may be inspired in the counsel and advice they give to church members, seldom today do leaders publicly speak of doctrine outside of the basics. This has rankled some members who blame priesthood leadership for their spiritual and scriptural ignorance. Nevertheless, there exists a very good reason for the presentation of basic doctrines in the church.

There exists Three Doctrinal ‘M’s or levels of doctrine discussed in the scriptures: *Milk*, *Meat*, and *Mysteries*. By necessity and design there is a dairy department in every ward and stake of the church. The church must provide a never-ending supply of milk products through a fourth ‘M’, the *Manuals*. ALL manuals must teach to the lowest common denominator in the church, from the Primary youth to the newly baptized member. All spiritual knowledge must be built on the solid foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ: Faith, Repentance, Baptism, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Thus the basic milk products must be available to all ages and all levels of understanding.

Some complain about the monotony of the milk and wonder why the church doesn't serve steak now and then. The church *cannot* teach the meat. Without the foundation of the milk, the meat will choke the unprepared. This meat must be actively and personally pursued by the individual who “hungers and thirsts after righteousness.” All must learn by “study and also by faith” and do so “*line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.*” Providing the meat is not

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5. *Journal of Discourses*, 14:205

6. *Millennial Star* 49. 48 (November 28, 1887): 760-763; A Letter written by B. H. Roberts November 4, 1887

the responsibility of the church or its leaders; that responsibility rests upon the individual. The Gospel Doctrine class, at best, should stimulate an appetite for the Bar-B-Que. Sustained by the milk, the meat is extracted from the scriptures by personal initiative and study. It's from the scriptures that the doctrinal depth and discovery of the eternal truths are offered, and they are found only by those who have expended the effort and sacrificed the time to seek and study more.

There are two reasons why the church should not be condemned for the menu of milk products offered in church meetings and the manuals. *First*: the church's responsibility is to lay the foundation for that newest member of the church and gospel. Each lesson and manual is geared to offer the basics, and to inspire and direct the individual to seek for an in-depth understanding in their personal study of the scriptures. *Second*: the lack of scripture knowledge by some, mixed with tradition and doctrinal speculation by many members, would render every class a smorgasbord of beliefs and feelings. This would result in destructive time tangents and perhaps perpetuate false traditions or opinions that may be taught and believed as doctrine.

A lay ministry has a tendency to make everyone an expert on doctrine, no matter how active or inactive they may be or have been. This is one important reason manuals are prepared, so that tangents are controlled and basic and true doctrines are taught. This means that the meat that is found in the scriptures should be *individually sought but restrictively taught*. Unfortunately, those who make no effort to find the meat rarely have the teeth and muscles to chew it. Like life, the 'milk' can and should be the springboard into 'meat' of the scriptures. Those who want more than the 'milk' they get in church *are not* victims of a failed church correlation, but victims of their own laziness and rationalizations. The 'meat' is of no value to those who will not use their own energy to find it. The demand that others, in particular the church, provide the 'meat' without any personal preparation will only cause them to choke on the most tender of cuts.

On the other side of the instructional spectrum, there are those who believe kosher law applies to learning, insisting that milk and meat cannot be mixed. Firm in their belief that all members should ingest only milk products, they cough and sputter whenever a little meat broth is introduced in the Gospel Doctrine class. Having never been outside the dairy section (believing that true spiritual insights must be composed of only milk), they are openly suspicious of non-dairy products and insist everyone get back to the safety of the dairy aisle.

The *Mysteries*, (whatever they are) on the other hand, come from God to the *prepared* individual who seeks further light and truth. Further light and knowledge always comes with increased accountability, and in the case of mysteries, there are certain restrictions. As scripture makes clear, mysteries come only to those who are prepared to receive them, and they are for the individual's own knowledge and enlightenment—not the body of the church in any setting—and therefore should not be shared with those who lack the same preparation. Those who have been blessed with an understanding of important truths (mysteries) will not talk about them, while those who discuss them often don't know what they're talking about. Those who receive revelation must be prepared not only to ask the question but also be just as prepared to receive the answer. Those who receive light and truth are not only accountable for it but also restricted in how it might be used.

There is a divine rule of order for the reception and dissemination of revealed knowledge and manifestations. Joseph Smith warned of the "impropriety" of listening to those who claim to have



manifestations, visions, and special knowledge who then seek to correct the church organization that God has set up. Joseph explains this restriction by stating:

I will inform you that it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of church, or any one, to receive instruction for those in authority higher than themselves; *therefore, you will see the impropriety of giving heed to them*; but if any person have a vision or a visitation from a heavenly messenger it must be for his own benefit and instruction; for the fundamental principles, government, and doctrine of the church are vested in the keys of the kingdom. (TPJS, p. 21)

Alma teaches about the restrictions placed on those who may receive insights into what are called ‘mysteries,’ as did Joseph Smith above:

And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: *It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless, they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart* only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. (Alma 12:9)

One can be assured that when a person begins to declare special visions, visitations, assignments, and authorities, crying ‘lo here, or lo there!’ that they are seeking to deceive the very elect. Invariably, these events lack the requisite witnesses and fail the tests outlined in scripture, defying the economy and order of God. The words of Christ should be heeded as He commands, “believe him not” (JS Matthew 24:21, 25).

So what is our responsibility when a priesthood leader makes a statement or acts in a way that seems incongruent with our learning and education? Some will question whether the leaders were really inspired or worthy opening the door to doubt. The real question that should instead be asked is: Are they fulfilling their responsibility in the administration of the gospel?

Remember, the primary responsibility of priesthood leadership lies in the administration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is their job and the purpose for which they are called. Under the guidance and direction of the Lord, they are empowered (inspired) to discharge their duties within the scope of their call. At all other times, they are human and must make their own decisions and speak their own opinions. One need not worry if their opinions and traditions are incongruent with accepted theories of science, or don't agree with the scriptural interpretations of other priesthood leaders. All may be assured that their counsel on spiritual matters will *point to the path* that leads to God. From there, it is *an individual* responsibility to grasp the iron rod and make one's own way toward the Tree of Life.

Salvation is not only an individual responsibility; it is also a joint effort with the Divine. The sacrifice has been provided and Christ stands at the door and knocks. Those who hope to be embraced by God, however, must individually be prepared to open that door, and then act upon the knowledge that is received. Priesthood leaders have been called and set apart to help those within the scope of their responsibility reach that door with the spiritual strength to initiate a personal relationship with the Savior. Their help (counsel, teachings, ordinances) means nothing

if the individual refuses to come unto Christ through the fruits meet for repentance and character change.

To recap: That faith which keeps one active in the gospel is a faith centered in Jesus Christ. All general authorities and priesthood leaders are sustained in their specific responsibility in the ministry and administration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are not sustained because they have read the scriptures more than someone else, nor are they called to expound the mysteries, answer every question, or explain and give commentary on the scriptures. They are not sustained because of their exceeding righteousness, nor with the expectation that they will be perfect in every action, work, word, or thought.

If the local priesthood authorities (under the direction of the general leadership) ensure that the baptized member (me, the individual) has been provided every opportunity to participate in the ordinances of the gospel, they have succeeded. When every opportunity to develop and strengthen that relationship with God and man through the gospel and church organization has been provided, the priesthood leaders have then fulfilled their responsibility to the individuals that have sustained them. If each week the sacrament is prepared, blessed, and passed at sacrament meeting by those authorized, and the baptismal font is filled when someone desires to be baptized, a record is kept, and witnesses provided, the leaders have succeeded in their responsibility. It is to this end that they are sustained.

The personal weaknesses and faults of priesthood leaders can be overlooked if they do not affect their ability to administer the gospel. Every man has faults, and there is “none good but one, and that is God” (see Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). It doesn't matter who they are or the calling they have—all men have faults, weaknesses of the flesh, pride, and intellect. To expect perfection and infallibility from any man but Christ is foolish. Yet God will work with and inspire men in their weaknesses and imperfections.

Of course, our leaders should be men of good character, as Jethro explains to his son-in-law Moses:

21 Moreover thou shalt *provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:* (Exodus 18:21)

Moses was instructed by Jethro to choose good men that "fear God", placing character, faith and testimony as primary traits in that choice. They must be "men of truth" and "hating covetousness". In the opening of this dispensation the Lord instructed Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery what traits to look for in the men that would become apostles in the restored priesthood.

27 Yea, even twelve; and the Twelve shall be my disciples, and they shall take upon them my name; and the Twelve are they who shall desire to *take upon them my name with full purpose of heart.*

28 And if they desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart, they are *called to go into all the world to preach my gospel* unto every creature.

29 And they are they who are *ordained of me to baptize in my name, according to that which is written;*

30 And you have that which is written before you; wherefore, *you must perform it according to the words which are written.*

31 And now I speak unto you, the Twelve—Behold, my grace is sufficient for you; *you must walk uprightly before me and sin not.*

32 And, behold, *you are they who are ordained of me to ordain priests and teachers; to declare my gospel, according to the power of the Holy Ghost which is in you, and according to the callings and gifts of God unto men;* (D&C 18:27-32)

Oliver was instructed to find men that would:

- Take upon my name with "full purpose of heart"
- "Go into all the world to preach my gospel"
- "baptize in my name"
- Do their work "according to that which is written"
- "Walk uprightly"
- "Sin not"
- Ordain others to priesthood responsibilities
- Do their work "according to the power of the Holy Ghost"
- Do their work "according to the callings and gifts of God unto men"

These few verses in the Doctrine and Covenants outline three important aspects of those chosen to become apostles: *who* they are, *what* they should do, and *how* they are to do it. First is *who*, the kind of men they should be in relation to their character and testimony: the apostolic priesthood leaders should be good men with a commitment to God and righteousness. Second is *what* their responsibilities are going to be that they should be prepared to accomplish. They must preach the gospel throughout the world and baptize and ordain others to the work. Third and last is *how* they are to accomplish this important work. Verses 29 and 30 both stipulate that what they do must be according to scripture ('that which is written'), as it is the standard. The second aspect of *how*, is that all that they do *within this responsibility* (not every aspect of their life) should be done under the inspiration and power of the Holy Ghost, which is a gift of God given to all the good and righteous, not just priesthood leaders. Every priesthood leader should seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost in discerning the gifts of those who might best serve in any calling. No individual leader or teacher is perfect. All must do their best using their personal judgment and education coupled with the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

God can and does use men and women in their weaknesses and can use everyone who is willing to serve. Even so, the judgments of mankind and even priesthood leaders are based on personal opinions of righteousness and the fences that may have been placed around specific laws and commandments. Would or should it be an issue that Christ drank wine or that Christ chose Judas for an apostle? Did He not know about Judas' character? Would it make a difference that Peter, who walked with the Savior daily and who was chosen to become the president of the church, denied Christ three times? These are not issues that affect the administration of the gospel. The rule is taught to Peter and every other leader: "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Joseph Smith said this about recognizing the quality of the leaders we sustain:

The servants of God teach nothing but principles of eternal life, by their works ye shall know them. A good man will speak good things and holy principles, and an evil man evil things. ... I exhort you to give heed to all the virtue and the teachings which I have given you. (TPJS, p 367)

This statement by Joseph Smith would indicate that outside of the administration of the gospel and priesthood responsibilities, the church leadership can and do have their own activities, opinions and interpretations. Nevertheless, in their assigned responsibility as chosen ministers and administrators, I as an individual can and do sustain them as the Doctrine and Covenants teach:

65 Wherefore, it must needs be that one be appointed of the High Priesthood to preside over the priesthood, and he shall be called President of the High Priesthood of the Church;  
91 And again, the duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses—  
92 Behold, here is wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church. (D&C 107:65, 91-92)

## **Author's Note:**

I accept and sustain the President and Prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Quorum of the First Presidency, and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in their responsibility as outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants. I sustain them in their position and responsibility, recognizing their inspiration and authority, along with the “gifts of God” that He bestows on the leaders that are called as the authorized administrators of the gospel of salvation and eternal life.

I can and do support and sustain all my priesthood leaders, general and local! It is my understanding and belief (from scripture) that the most important role of priesthood leadership is the administration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Priesthood leaders exist to *assist me*, the individual, in the improvement of my character, and to provide the opportunities and ordinances to strengthen my relationship with Jesus Christ, and His gospel. Their responsibility of service is to *assist me* in developing a better understanding of the Atonement of Christ in order to make it more effective in my life. However, coming unto Christ and having that personal relationship is *my* responsibility, not the responsibility of my priesthood leaders.

I do not expect the priesthood leadership to expound deep doctrines or reveal mysteries, nor do I expect them to always be correct or perfect in their understanding and teaching of scripture or doctrine. I realize that priesthood leaders are not called because they know more or studied more about the scriptures than anyone else. They have been called and set apart to administer the gospel of Jesus Christ for the benefit of my family and myself. According to scripture, that gospel is: Faith, Repentance, Baptism, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost— nothing more.

My priesthood leaders are not expected or required to ensure that I have a relationship with Christ. Nor are they required to teach the gospel to my family or myself (that is my responsibility). However, I recognize that the priesthood organization has the authority to provide opportunities through the activities and auxiliaries of the church to *assist me* in my responsibility. As a parent

and individual I have a personal responsibility to learn more and teach my family the Gospel of Christ.

My weekly gospel needs as I develop a relationship with my Savior is to partake of the Sacrament which has been prepared, blessed, and *administered* by authorized ministers. In this ordinance, I covenant “to keep his commandments and always remember him,” seeking for that relationship with my God and Redeemer each week. Simply put, if the sacrament is prepared, blessed, and passed by the priesthood authority required, and the ordinances of salvation are made available to myself and my family as needed, then the priesthood leaders have fulfilled their responsibility. I expect no more.

Thus, what my priesthood leaders (general and local, past or present) know, think they know, or don’t know, about particular aspects of doctrine and scripture will not affect my sustaining of them. I can and do sustain them even if they have the weaknesses and frailties of man and mortality—whether it be of the flesh, mind, culture, or education—as long as they are faithful in the administration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I sustain them in their call to administer the gospel and make it available to myself and my family, not in their perfection or infallibility.

Bruce H. Porter