

16 The Church and Priesthood

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The foundation for an enduring and lasting testimony will always lie in the relationship one develops with the Savior and not with the religious organization designed to administer the Gospel. There exists no ‘Mormon Church’ in the Spirit World. The only righteous congregation will be the faithful believers and followers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As established earlier, the gospel is comprised of 1) Faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement; 2) Repentance, the process of changing your character, which is made possible through faith in the Atonement and the hope of a celestial resurrection; 3) Baptism, a covenant of obedience that must precede progression in the gospel; and 4) the Gift of the Holy Ghost, which will testify of the Father and the Son, to those who have entered into the “covenant of obedience” and are “exercising faith unto repentance.” Eventually all who actively participate in the first principles and ordinances of the gospel may receive a remission of sins as they are “wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 6:4; 2 Nephi 31:17).

The Lord’s *organization of administration* for His gospel is the priesthood leadership and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This *organization of administration* is the only church that has the authority through the restoration of the priesthood to administer the Gospel of Christ.

During the personal ministries of Christ in both ancient Palestine and the promised land of Lehi’s descendants, the Savior taught His Gospel, but did not organize the church. In both areas, the Savior restored the higher law that the Children of Israel lost at the time of Moses, teaching His gospel of faith, repentance, baptism, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Christ then organized the priesthood leadership with the commission and authority to administer the gospel He taught. The Savior provided the necessary instructions and authorization (priesthood and keys) to these inspired administrators to make the gospel available for all who would like to participate.

Then as now, the priesthood was organized to administer the gospel of Jesus Christ. This began on an individual level. But as the number of believers increased, the leadership recognized the need to create a church (organized congregation) in order to provide the necessary ordinances and teachings to larger groups in a more productive, orderly, and organized way.

The word “church” is used two different ways. The broad definition is: a congregation of similar believers. However, it is sometimes used to denote the voice of the highest priesthood leadership that administers the gospel. In this instance, the *organization of administration* [purposely phrased in this manner] is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For example, when the leaders issue a statement, or discuss church policy, “the church” is understood to be the voice of the priesthood leadership whose responsibility it is to administer the gospel. When the term *organization of administration* is used, it is meant to underscore that only The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its priesthood leadership has the divine authority to administer the gospel.

The organizing of believers into congregations makes it easier for the leadership of the church to administer the gospel effectively and keep records of members' activity and participation in all

ordinances. Besides administering the gospel, the priesthood leadership and the church organization provide opportunities to teach and serve one another. In their responsibility to 'perfect the saints,' the teachings and counsel of those who are chosen as priesthood administrators will help members learn how best to make necessary character changes that will help free them from the sins of their generation. The main responsibility of the priesthood leadership is to make sure that every individual (able by law) who may desire to "come unto Christ" has every opportunity to participate in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Priesthood leaders are chosen by the "common consent" of the general membership, who sustain, recognize and accept them as gospel administrators within their stewardship. In the stakes and wards the members themselves provide the authorization to administer the gospel with its respective "keys" (the authority to make decisions) for the administration of the gospel in the given location and area (ward and stake) of their responsibility. Priesthood leaders, general and local, are *not* sustained to teach mysteries, provide secret ordinances, expound deep doctrines, or to teach those things that are not elemental and essential to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their call and authority is to administer the ordinances (Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost) and teach faith and repentance. To expect more is foolishness. To condemn priesthood leadership for what they did or didn't do in their life, or what they taught or didn't teach, or to find fault in their character when they have been faithful in their responsibility to administer the gospel, is even more foolish. There is *only one person to blame* for a lack of spiritual experiences and enlightenment and it is NOT the Church or priesthood leadership.

Most of the issues causing some members to question their faith have little to do with the teachings of and about Christ that are found in ancient and modern scripture. However, many of the concerns and questions causing members to question their faith have to do with something a priesthood leader, past or present, may have personally said or did not say, or taught, or believed. It is important to remember that what they may have said or believed is separate and distinct from their call and responsibility in the administration of the gospel. Priesthood leaders cannot claim infallibility in their personal knowledge, opinions, tradition, or interpretation of scripture. Accordingly, faith and testimony should be in Christ and His gospel, not in the vehicle of administration. The church and leadership exists as an aid for the individual to come unto Christ and participate in the necessary ordinances administered with the correct and authorized authority.

The definition used in this work for the church and priesthood leadership is *the organization divinely authorized to administer the gospel*. The priesthood leadership's responsibilities, as outlined in the scriptures, are two-fold: 1) to administer the gospel of Jesus Christ (which includes the work of the ministry, and the perfecting of the saints); and 2) to protect the interests of the church and the faith of the members. In every reference in scripture where the Savior calls and sets apart His priesthood leadership, He first teaches the gospel to the leadership and then gives them their commission and responsibility concerning that gospel. The priesthood organization is established and designed for the ease of the administration of the gospel. This church organization is the vehicle that will assist the priesthood in that administrative responsibility.

The Savior called and commissioned the twelve disciples at the beginning of His ministry among the Nephites:

21 And the Lord said unto him: [Nephi] *I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven.*

22 And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he *gave unto them power to baptize.* And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and *there shall be no disputations* among you.

23 Verily I say unto you, that *whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.*

41 Therefore, *go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken,* unto the ends of the earth. (3 Nephi 11:21-23, 41)

1 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who *had been called, and received power and authority to baptize,* was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you *to minister unto you, and to be your servants;* and unto them *I have given power that they may baptize you with water;* and after that ye are baptized with water, behold, I will baptize you with fire and with the Holy Ghost; therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am. (3 Nephi 12:1)

Christ *ensures* that the disciples understand their responsibility in the church that will later be organized in His name, as Mormon explains in his editorial comments.

17 And it came to pass that *the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost.*

18 And many of them saw and heard *unspeakable things, which are not lawful to be written.*

19 And *they taught, and did minister one to another;* and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another.

20 And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them.

21 And *they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ.* (3 Nephi 26:17-21)

18 But this much I know, according to the record which hath been given—they did go forth upon the face of the land, and *did minister unto all the people, uniting as many to the church as would believe in their preaching; baptizing them, and as many as were baptized did receive the Holy Ghost.*

(3 Nephi 28:18)

The calling of the twelve apostles in this dispensation restored the same responsibilities that the twelve disciples and apostles had in the Meridian of Times.

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;*

33 And I, Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God, have spoken it. (D&C 18:27-33)

When the converted masses become larger, congregations are organized creating the Church of Christ as discussed in 3 Nephi 27. The priesthood organization and leadership can then more efficiently teach believers and baptized converts how and why it is necessary to come unto Christ. Priesthood leaders can also more efficiently officiate in the performance of ordinances such as the sacrament, baptism, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost if members are organized into groups or ‘churches’ rather than going into every individual home to minister. Connected to this responsibility and organization is the keeping of records for the sake of efficiency and the reduction of redundancy.

Paul explains in Ephesians that the organization for administration must be built upon “apostles and prophets,” which is the priesthood leadership with the responsibility to assist in the individual need to come unto the “chief corner stone” of Christ.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; (Ephesians 2:19, 20)

Paul teaches in the same Chapter that the organization of administration is essential, not only to come unto Christ, but to become like Him:

11 And he gave some, *apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

12 For the *perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

13 Till we all come in the *unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:*

These scriptures make clear that the purpose of the church organization is the same in every dispensation. The responsibility of priesthood leadership is to *assist the individual* to come unto Christ. It is not the responsibility of the church or priesthood to ensure a relationship with God, nor to make sure the individual will come to Christ, but only to provide the necessary teachings, ordinances programs, auxiliaries, and opportunities so that those who have a desire may come unto Him and work out *their own* salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12, Mormon 9:27). One cannot blame others, not even priesthood leaders, for a personal lack of spiritual experiences or gospel understanding. All are victims of themselves. The lack of a relationship with the Savior is due to one’s own choice and negligence.

Regarding the calling of Latter-Day apostles, Joseph Smith made the following statement about their responsibilities:

They are the twelve apostles, who are called to the office of the Traveling High Council, who are to preside over the churches of the Saints, among the Gentiles, where there is no presidency established; and they are to travel and preach among the Gentiles, until the Lord shall command them to go to the Jews. *They are to hold the keys of this ministry, [preach the Gospel] to unlock the door of the kingdom of heaven unto all nations, and to preach the gospel to every creature. This is the power, authority, and virtue of their apostleship.* (TPJS. p 74, italics added for emphasis)

The twelve's responsibility, according to this description by the prophet Joseph, is inseparably connected to the gospel of Jesus Christ and making it available to all mankind.

The apostles are to:

- preside over the churches,
- preach among the Gentiles,
- hold the keys of this ministry,
- unlock the door of the kingdom of heaven unto all nations,
- preach the gospel to every creature.

According to the Prophet Joseph, this responsibility is “the power, authority and virtue of their apostleship.” In a nutshell, the Quorum of 12 Apostles are to *make available* the gospel (through the priesthood and Church organization) to *all who might seek* that personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This they do through the ordinances and principles of the gospel administered and taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This responsibility and authority is the power of the priesthood, office, and position they hold.

The restored priesthood organization and church is the only vehicle that may, under the order and authority of Christ, administer the gospel of salvation to mankind. That administration is usually accomplished through the inspired teachings of priesthood leaders and the gospel ordinances made available to those who seek after these things.

There are multitudes of people who have an enduring faith in Christ, his Atonement and resurrection who are not Latter-day Saints. Eventually everyone will receive all the necessary teachings and ordinances of salvation and exaltation. The *organization of administration* exists to ensure that all mankind, alive or dead, have available *if they choose*, all the ordinances necessary for their desired spiritual progression.

To review: The priesthood leadership and its organization exist for the administration of the gospel and to protect the interests of the church and the faith of the members. It is:

- Not* for the teaching of so called “mysteries;”
- Not* for expounding scripture and providing *deep doctrine*;
- Not* for the dissemination of secret doctrines;
- Not* for the performing of secret ordinances;

- Not* for answering the questions of detractors or unbelievers.

The first principles and ordinances of the gospel are faith, repentance, baptism, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost. The first two principles are the responsibility of the individual as the church or priesthood cannot “faith” someone or “repent” someone. Exercising one’s faith unto repentance is singular to the individual in their personal quest for a relationship with Christ and His Atonement. The authorized administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost are the responsibility of the priesthood organization. These ordinances are made available, with authority, to all who desire to participate, enhancing the individual hope and ability to strengthen that personal relationship founded upon their faith and repentance.

A common goal among detractors, like Korihor and others in the Book of Mormon is to make their listeners feel like duped victims of negligent priesthood leaders. Vocal apostates teach that the priesthood leadership has held back powerful ordinances or special knowledge of doctrines and mysteries. These individuals often claim that there is lost knowledge, authority and power, which, if believed, spawns a "gospel victim" mentality. Thus, blaming others eliminates a personal responsibility for their own inadequacies and salvation. These modern-day agitators, like Korihor, Zeezrom, and Sherem, use scriptural manipulation and elaborate oration to seduce the faithful. They convince the elect that their doctrinal ignorance, lack of knowledge, and lack of spiritual experiences is not their own fault, but the fault of church leadership.

It has never been a church or priesthood responsibility to “save” the individual, or ensure that personal relationship with Christ. Priesthood responsibility lies in the injunction to administer and make available the gospel in principle and in ordinance by assisting the sincere seeker in the spiritual journey that will lead them to Christ. Everyone who sincerely seeks a relationship with Christ may have it. Everyone who exercises faith in Christ, repents of their sins, is baptized and receives the gift of the Holy Ghost, initiates the process to obtain that personal relationship with the Atonement and salvation. The success of this quest is individual and personal, as is its failure.

The sacrament prayer is not a blessing for the bread or water, but a blessing for those who partake, as these emblems might become “sanctified *to the souls of those who partake* of it” and are sincerely seeking that personal relationship. As Section 27 of the Doctrine and Covenants makes clear, what’s important is not what we partake of, but the state of our heart as we do so:

2 For, behold, I say unto you, that it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament, *if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory—remembering unto the Father my body which was laid down for you, and my blood which was shed for the remission of your sins.* (D&C 27:2)

To recap: A relationship with Christ, the Atonement, and the gospel is a personal accomplishment—not a priesthood or church responsibility. The priesthood cannot “faith” a member, nor can the church “repent” a person. However, these two (the Church and Priesthood) can and do assist the individual by providing the ordinances of baptism and Gift of the Holy Ghost, as well as inspired instruction and council (through auxiliaries classes and conferences) for those who seek that relationship and opportunity of redemption.