Discussions with My Friend: An Introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ By David Stewart

Chapter 28: Divine Authority through the Eternal Priesthood

The Church of Jesus Christ
Teachings alone are not adequate to constitute the Church of Jesus Christ. Scriptures teach that Christ's church requires the priesthood authority of ordained, divinely chosen representatives[1] receiving ongoing revelation from God.[2] The Church must also be "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."[3] When these elements are in place, true teachings flow naturally from scripture and revelation to authorized and inspired leaders. Without these elements of ongoing revelation from Christ through living representatives holding divine authority in harmony with scripture, doctrines become corrupted and the missions of the scriptural church cannot be accomplished. The shortfall of sectarian Christian churches does not therefore consist in merely a few doctrinal misunderstandings, but is rather a foundational matter of the entire institution's lack of divine authority or connection to God.

Confusion on Authority Today
The Protestant reformers recognized the problems of the Catholic and Orthodox Christian churches, which had strayed far from Christ's gospel. However, these reformers lacked authority to restore Christ's church and perform authorized ordinances. Without any scriptural link to divine authority, theologians contrived the unscriptural doctrine of a "universal priesthood of all believers" to justify those who teach, perform gospel ordinances, and establish churches without divine authority. Many Protestants, Evangelicals, and other Christians claim that Jesus never established a structured priesthood organization,[4] and assert that anyone who believes in Christ has the authority to teach and even perform gospel ordinances such as baptism. Scripture and early Christian writings assert the need for properly constituted priesthood authority, and demonstrate that the ancient Church of Jesus Christ strongly rejected the idea of a "universal priesthood of all believers" and other false teachings on authority.

Priesthood Organization Established by Christ
The early Christian church had an identifiable Priesthood organization established by Christ himself. Christ "ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach."[5] He called his twelve apostles, and "gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick."[6] Luke tells us that "the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come."[7] Paul tells us that Christ "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."[8]

Priesthood Authority
Priesthood authority is bestowed in an orderly fashion by those with authority to confer it. Those chosen by God are ordained to

the priesthood by the laying on of hands of authorized priesthood holders.[9] Only those in authority are authorized to ordain elders and other priesthood officers.[10]

//
Although buying and selling of offices of the clergy was a common practice in the medieval Catholic church, divine priesthood authority cannot be purchased.[11] Authorized priesthood leaders cannot be elected by factions, nor can they be appointed by secular rulers. The leaders of God's church must be called by God. The Savior established His pattern for the transmission of authorized priesthood authority, and taught that essential gospel ordinances must be performed by one holding this authority: "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."[12]

Individuals do not receive authority to preach the gospel or establish churches simply by feeling an inner calling to preach the word. The Savior taught his apostles: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain."[13] The Apostle Paul declared of the priesthood: "no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron."[14] Aaron was called by God and ordained to the priesthood by Moses, God's authorized minister. The Lord told Moses that to call Aaron and his sons, thou "shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office."[15] The Russian word for imposter, samozvanets, literally means "one who calls oneself." This accurately describes the state of sectarian ministers who preach without divine calling or authority.

Unauthorized Ordinances
Ordinances performed by unauthorized individuals, even when sincere, are strongly condemned in scripture. King Uzziah of Judah, who is praised because he "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" and "sought God" for most of his reign,[16] was smitten by the Lord for attempting to perform ordinances for which he lacked priesthood authority. The Priests of the Lord "withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God."[17] For his transgression, Uzziah was smitten with leprosy and was "cut off from the house of the Lord" for the rest of his life.[18]

The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, written between 275 AD and 360 AD as a "manual of instruction, worship, polity, and usage for both clergy and laity," stresses scriptural teachings on priesthood authority:

> "As, therefore, it was not lawful for one of another tribe, that was not a Levite, to offer anything, or to approach the altar without the priest, so also do you do nothing without the bishop; for if any one does anything without the bishop, he does it to no purpose. For it will not be esteemed as of any avail to him. For as Saul, when he had offered without Samuel, was told, 'It will not avail for thee;' so every person among the laity, doing anything without the priest, labours in vain. And as Uzziah the king, who was not a priest, and yet would exercise the functions of the priests, was smitten with leprosy for his transgression; so every lay person shall not be unpunished who despises God, and is so mad as to affront His priests, and unjustly to snatch that honour to himself: not imitating Christ, 'who glorified not Himself to be made an high priest;' but waited till He heard from His Father, 'The Lord sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.' If, therefore, Christ did not glorify Himself without the Father, how dare any man thrust himself into the priesthood who has not received that dignity from his superior, and do such things which it is lawful only for the priests to do? Were not the followers of Corah, even though they were of the tribe of Levi, consumed with fire, because they rose up against Moses and Aaron, and meddled with such things as did not belong to them? And Dathan and Abiram went down quick into hell; and the rod that budded put a stop to the readiness of the multitude, and demonstrated who was the high priest ordained by God. You ought therefore, brethren, to bring your sacrifices and your oblations to the bishop, as to your high priest, either by yourselves or by the deacons; and do you bring not those only, but also your first-fruits, and your tithes, and your free-will offerings to him."[19]

Early Christian Teachings on Authority
Early Christians believed that only the acts of lawfully-ordained priesthood holders were valid. Ignatius, the second bishop of Antioch, wrote to the Church of Smyrna that no baptism is valid without the bishop's approval: "It is not right either to baptize or to celebrate the agape apart from the bishop; but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God -- so that everything you do may be secure and valid."[20] He continued: "He who is within the sanctuary is pure; he who is outside the sanctuary is not pure -- that is, whoever does anything apart from the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons is not pure in conscience."[21] Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, stated that "it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church" and referred to the "the order of the priesthood."[22] Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, declared:

> "Only they who are set over the Church and established in the Gospel law, and in the ordinance of the Lord, are allowed to baptize and to give remission of sins [cf. John 20:21-23]; but that without, nothing can either be bound or loosed, where there is none who can either bind or loose anything. Nor do we propose this, dearest brother, without the authority of divine Scripture, when we say that all things are arranged by divine direction by a certain law and by special ordinance, and that none can usurp to himself, in opposition to the bishop and priests, anything which is not of his own right and power."[23]

Cyprian referred to "the office of our priesthood" and "the vigor of the priesthood," observing: "hands were placed upon the repentant by the bishops and clergy;" "the Church is founded upon the bishops, and every act of the Church is controlled by these same rulers"; "it behooves the deacon ... to acknowledge the honor of the priest, and to satisfy the bishop set over him with full humility."[24]

The Levitical Priesthood
Two priesthoods are mentioned in the Bible: The lower Levitical or Aaronic priesthood,[25] and the higher Melchizedek priesthood.[26] The question to sectarian Christian groups that believe they have authority from apostolic succession is, what priesthood do they believe themselves to hold? The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only major Christian church that claims to possess either the Aaronic (or Levitical) or Melchizedek priesthoods. These are the only priesthoods

mentioned in scripture, so any other priesthood order claimed by other churches is non-scriptural. Many Christian assert that Aaron's priesthood was abolished when the Savior came to earth. The New Testament does not teach this. To the contrary, the Lord himself referred to the Aaronic Priesthood as "an eternal priesthood."[27] The idea that an eternal and unchanging God abolished His eternal priesthood is merely a rationalization of faiths with no credible claim to priesthood authority.

The Higher Priesthood

Paul observes that Jesus Christ was "a high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec."[28] Melchizedek, king of Salem, (later Jerusalem), was the "priest of the most high God" to whom Abraham paid tithes; he blessed Abraham and administered to him bread and wine foreshadowing the Christian Sacrament.[29]

Many non-LDS Christians believe that Christ was the only Christian high priest and the only person to hold the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. However, scriptures contradict this view. James A. Carver writes: "Christ was after the Order of Melchizedek. Observe that he was after the Order of Melchizedek. For there to be an order, a group of people must belong. The Greek word for 'order' is taxin, which means, 'a fixed succession' or 'manner.' If Christ belonged to an 'order' then Jesus was not the only one to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. He established an order of that priesthood in his day."[30]

The Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate that some ancient Jews understood that men could hold the Melchizedek priesthood. BYU Professor S. Kent Brown wrote:

> "There was further concern for priesthood matters at Qumran. Not only do we find a good deal said about the priests (the direct descendants of Aaron) and Levites as distinct from the laymen of the community, but there was additional interest in Melchizedek's priesthood and those who would share his sacred lot, that is, those who would bear the same priesthood. The rather late Christian understanding that Jesus would be the last High Priest of the Melchizedek order (see Hebrews 7:24, marginal reading no. 5 in most King James Version translations) is based on an erroneous interpretation of the Greek word aparabaton which does not mean 'intransmissible' but means 'unchangeable' when referring to Jesus' priesthood. Because the Essenes of the Dead Sea obviously expected other priests to arise after the order of Melchizedek and because their Melchizedek text bears a close connection to the ideas expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the notion that Jesus was to be the last High Priest cannot be sustained by an appeal to this scroll [11Q Melchizedek] which was being read by Jews contemporary with Jesus and Paul."[31]

Non-LDS Christians even invented new meanings for Greek words in an attempt to provide rationalizations for their theology. Dr. Brown writes: "no contemporaneous Greco-Roman source ever uses the term aparabaton with the meaning 'intransmissible' -- it always means 'unchangeable.'"[32] Michael Griffith wrote: "some commentators assert that the Greek word for 'unchangeable' used in reference to the Savior's priesthood in Hebrews 7:24 actually means 'untransferable,' 'without a successor,' or 'that doth not pass from one to another.' Thus, it is argued that since Christ's priesthood is 'untransferable,' then no one else can hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. However, this rendering, which at best has always been viewed as a marginal reading, has long been rejected by the best Greek scholars."[33] Most recent English Bible translations render the meaning of the word as "unchangeable" and not as "untransferable."

Michael Griffith continues: "Other indications that Christ was not the only one who held the Melchizedek Priesthood can be found in Hebrews 4:14 and 5:5, where we read that Christ was 'a great high priest' and that he 'glorified not himself to be made an high priest.' If Jesus had been the only Christian high priest 'after the order of Melchizedek,'[34] then it stands to reason that the definite article 'the' would have been used in these verses instead of the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an.'"[35]

The mere designation of the priesthood by the name of Melchizedek, an Old Testament figure, by demonstrates that this priesthood was held by others besides Christ Himself. Early Christians understood that other men held the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, states: "there was a righteous king called Melchizedek, in the city of Salem, which is now Jerusalem. This was the first priest of all high priests of the Most High God ... And from his time priests were found in all the earth."[36]

A House of Order

The Apostle Paul noted that one of the roles of properly-constituted priesthood authority of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists in Christ's Church is to help us to "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 fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."[37]

The Lord does not recognize ordinances performed by unauthorized ministers. In the Doctrine and Covenants, a book of modern scripture, the Lord states: "Wherefore, although a man should be baptized an hundred times it availeth him nothing, for you cannot enter in at the strait gate by the law of Moses, neither by your dead works. For it is because of your dead works that I have caused this last covenant and this church to be built up unto me, even as in days of old. Wherefore, enter ye in at the gate, as I have commanded, and seek not to counsel your God."[38] The Lord further declared:

> "Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion. Will I accept of an offering, saith the Lord, that is not made in my name? Or will I receive at your hands that which I have not appointed? And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was? I am the Lord thy God; and I give unto you this commandment -- that no man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word, which is my law, saith the Lord. And everything that is in the world, whether it be ordained of men, by thrones, or principalities, or powers, or things of name, whatsoever they may be, that are not by me or by my word, saith the Lord, shall be thrown down, and shall not remain after men are dead, neither in nor after the resurrection, saith the Lord your God. For whatsoever things remain are by me; and whatsoever things are not by me shall be shaken and destroyed."[39]

Ordinances performed by authorized priesthood holders represent the only path to baptism and other priesthood ordinances which will be acknowledged in heaven. The power of the priesthood also unlocks the pathway to miracles which can bless the

lives of families and individuals: "without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh."[40]

[1] John 15:16
[2]Matthew 16:17-18
[3]Ephesians 2:20
[4] Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Eerdmans, 1988. Vol. 7 p.388.
[5]Mark 3:14
[6]Luke 9:1-2
[7]Luke 10:1
[8]Ephesians 4:11-12
[9]Numbers 27:18-23, Deuteronomy 34:9, Acts 6:5-6, 1 Timothy 4:14
[10]Titus 1:5
[11]Acts 8:20
[12]John 10:1
[13]John 15:16
[14]Hebrews 5:4
[15]Exodus 28:41
[16]2 Chronicles 26:4-5
[17]2 Chronicles 26:18-19
[18]2 Chronicles 26:19-23
[19] Constitution of the Holy Apostles XXVII: 5-11.
[20] Ignatius to Smyrna 8:1-2 in Lightfoot, J.B. and Harmer, J.R., The Apostolic Fathers, [Grand Rapids, MI, Baker House], p. 113.
[21] Sparks, Jack N. The Apostolic Fathers. Light and Life, 1978. p. 94.
[22] Roberts and Donaldson 1:497
[23] Roberts and Donaldson 5:381.
[24] Roberts and Donaldson 5:291, 294, 305, 363, 366.
[25]Hebrews 7:11
[26]Hebrews 5:4, 10
[27]Numbers 25:13; Exodus 40:15
[28] Hebrews 5:5-6,10
[29] Genesis 14:18-20
[30] Carver, James A. "How do Latter-day Saints support the doctrine of Melchizedek Priesthood authority from the Bible?" Ensign. January 1986. p 54.
[31] Brown, S. Kent. "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective," BYU Studies (Winter 1983), pp. 56-57.
[32] Brown, S. Kent. "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective," BYU Studies (Winter 1983), pp. 56-57.
[33] Griffith, Michael. "The Necessity of Priesthood Authority: The LDS Church and the Early Christian Priesthood -- Ancient Christian evidence of the LDS Priesthood." In One Lord, One Faith: Writings of the Early Christian Fathers as Evidences of the Restoration. Horizon Publishers, 1996.
[34]Hebrews 5:6
[35] Griffith, Michael. "The Necessity of Priesthood Authority: The LDS Church and the Early Christian Priesthood -- Ancient Christian evidence of the LDS Priesthood." In One Lord, One Faith: Writings of the Early Christian Fathers as Evidences of the Restoration. Horizon Publishers, 1996.
[36] Roberts and Donaldson 2:107.
[37]Ephesians 4:13-14
[38]D&C 22:2-4
[39]D&C 132:8-14
[40] D&C 84:21