

SERMON SUBJECT: BEARERS OF CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

An ordinary citizen cannot act as policeman, judge, postmaster, assessor, or even in such a humble office as dog catcher, without authority from the unit of government of which is the representative and agent. A man may not serve as senator, congressman, customs officer, or officer in army, navy, marines, or coast guard, without authority. If I impersonate an officer and try to exercise his authority, I can be punished, no matter how well I seem to understand his duties, or how familiar I am with the book of rules which govern his actions. You may not sign my name to a check or contract without my express authority to do so; and if you do it without authority, you may be prosecuted and punished.

When it comes to representing God, we find that men are strangely reluctant to be governed by any such common sense rules. We find many conflicting theories and even more conflicting practices. Some claim to have received their authority to minister in God's stead and in Christ's name through a succession of authority from Peter down to the present day. Others who refuse to recognize that authority, claim to have authority from the Christian's book of rules -- the Bible; they minister in the things of God because they have gone to a seminary, have studied the Bible and have what might be called an authority of competence or of knowledge. Others draw their authority from various conferences, synods, assemblies, or congregations -- or from the church. Others recognize only the authority of an inner urge, or the call of Christ to the man himself.

Reason teaches us that authority to represent and commit God must come from God himself. An inner urge to serve him is not enough. King Uzziah felt such an urge, and insisted on burning incense before the altar; but this duty belonged to priesthood, and his presumption was punished with leprosy. (II Chron. 26:16-21) King Saul once got impatient when Samuel the prophet was delayed, and decided that since there was danger that the Philistines might attack at any moment, he as king had authority to sacrifice in the emergency. God not only did not recognize his sacrifice, but told Saul through his prophet Samuel, that the kingdom should be taken from him and given to David. (I Samuel 13:8-14) In the 16th chapter of Numbers there is a story of one who thought that authority came from the congregation Korah and two associates rebelled against Moses and his authority, and said: "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" Many of the congregation sided with Korah, but the earth opened and swallowed him and his company as punishment for this presumptuous sin.

The death penalties of the Mosaic code have been repealed, but God still looks with disfavor upon those who presume to act in his name. That there would be many such, who acted in his name but without his authority, is indicated by Jesus' statement: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I confess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Any good work done in the name of Christ will receive its reward; but when God's authority is required to commit him, the acts men presumptuously do in his name, even though they purport to be righteous, are works of iniquity.

When Jesus came to that point in his ministry where it was necessary for him to call twelve men to begin to share with him in the work of that ministry, he did not simply go out and pick twelve men. He spent all night in prayer: "And

when it was day, he called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve..." (Luke 6:12,13) Jesus sought the will of his Father, and delegated that authority only as God revealed his will to him after a night of prayer. Notice again that it was not the men who decided on the basis of an inner call that they were to be the twelve. Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you....." (John 15:16)

Acting in the name of and by the authority of God, his Father, Jesus gave certain authority to his apostles. They were to represent him. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John 20:21) "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." (Matt. 10:40 Cf. Luke 10:16, John 13:20) The apostles, and also the seventies were given authority to remit or retain sins, (John 20:23) to bind -- that is, to prevent -- and to loose, or to permit. (See Matt 16:19 and Matt. 18:18) They were sent out to teach all nations, to preach repentance, and to baptize believers in his name. (Matt 28:19,20; Luke 24:47,48)

The authority which Jesus gave to the apostles could be transmitted through them to others -- but not on their initiative. Only as the Holy Spirit gave command to designate the man called, and the office to which he was called, were the apostles empowered to lay on hands and ordain men. It is a principle of law that delegated authority cannot be further delegated; that if I give you authority to act for me, you cannot give to a third party that authority to act in my stead, or in my name. The apostles had authority to act in Christ's name, but they could not delegate that authority to their successors unless Christ made known his will through the revelation of his Holy Spirit.

When the apostles found it necessary to fill the place left vacant by Judas, they followed the example of prayer which Jesus had set for them, and then resorted to the old Jewish custom of casting the sacred lot, which resulted in the choice of Matthias. (Acts 1:21-26) The sixth chapter of Acts tells of the selection of seven men who were ordained by the laying on of the hands of the apostles after prayer. Among these were Stephen and Philip, whose names are familiar to every reader of the Book of Acts.

Throughout the Book of Acts, it seems to have been the custom to hand down the authority of priesthood by call from God, followed by ordination. Paul's first calling was given through Ananias; and although it was given simultaneously to Paul in his vision on the road to Damascus, it is important to observe that this was only a confirmation of the official call which came through Ananias, and telling him that Paul was a "chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:10-22) The ordination of Paul to the apostleship was commanded through certain teachers and prophets of Antioch, to whom the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2,3) Acts 16:1-3 tells how Paul chose Timothy to be his missionary companion; but it is evident that this is not the full story, for in first Timothy 4:14 Paul admonishes Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Evidently the gift and Spirit of prophecy had something to do with Timothy's call, and he was ordained following that call, under the hands of the elders, according to the pattern.

I have not been able to discover a single case in the New Testament where the minister for Christ simply felt his personal call and went to work. Paul lays down the rule most emphatically in Hebrews 5:4: "No man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." How was Aaron called? The story is told in the 4th chapter of Exodus. Moses desired a spokesman, because he was not eloquent enough to stand before Pharaoh. God rebuked Moses for his

lack of faith, but named Aaron as his assistant, and his spokesman. (vs. 16) Then the Lord directed Aaron to seek out Moses, but without telling him why. When they met, "Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him." (vs. 28) Then Moses and Aaron went together to the people, who accepted this ministry, (vs. 31) Later, when Israel had left Egypt and was worshipping in the tabernacle, God spoke again saying, "Take unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office..." (Ex. 28:1) Before a man takes upon himself priesthood authority, then, he must be called of God through the prophetic authority already set in the church. He himself may receive a confirmation of that call, if God so wills. Then the people must accept him as their representative before God, as God has chosen him to be God's minister to the people. Then he must be ordained by one having authority, and set apart to God's service.

Once a man has been properly called, commissioned of God, and ordained, how long does his authority last? That question can be easily answered by asking another. Suppose that you gave a man a power of attorney and authorized him to conduct your business while you were absent. If this representative of your flouted your will, disobeyed your orders, and managed the business in his way, for his own benefit, how long would you leave him in charge? Apostasy from the doctrine of Christ, disobedience to the will of Christ, rebellion against the Spirit of Christ inevitably bring a loss of authority. "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." (II John 9) When the early Christian church went into apostasy, its authority ceased.

How do we know it ceased? Because the signs that follow authority ceased. God does not issue written certificates or commissions to his servants and take them up when authority ceases; but he has promised that certain results and signs follow their ministry. When they administer in the ordinances of his church, his Spirit confirms that ministry. The 19th chapter of Acts gives an account of certain Ephesian disciples who had been baptized by an unnamed person, but who when questioned by Paul declared that they had never so much as heard of the Holy Ghost. Paul seems to have assumed that they were baptized without authority, for he baptized them again, and then laid hands on them, "and the Holy Ghost came upon them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied." Whenever and wherever in New Testament times men ministered for Christ with his authority, the signs followed the believer; the gifts of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit were made manifest. But when apostasy came in, authority went out; God was no more committed by the acts of his unfaithful servants, and the signs bearing witness to an authoritative ministry ceased.

Once authority had disappeared from the church through apostasy, no amount of reformation could bring it back. No man can give or pass on to others what he doesn't have. No amount of doctoring can restore life to a dead body; no amount of reformation could bring life to a dead church. Only life can create or beget life. A new act of creation from God himself was necessary to restore priesthood authority, to re-establish his church, and to endow it with life. But all the Christian world was saying that God no longer spoke to men, and that the signs no longer followed the believer. Then how were men to be called? By whose authority did they teach, preach, baptize, and confirm?

In a previous sermon we have said that the work of restoration of Christ's church was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Revelation 14:6, that another angel should fly through the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel. Who was that angel? Joseph Smith makes the bold but completely reasonable claim that it was John the Baptist, who came to prepare for Christ's first advent, and who according to Malachi 3:1 and 4:5,6 will come as Elias to prepare all things for the second advent. While Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were translating the

Book of Mormon, they came to a verse mentioning baptism for the remission of sins, and realizing their need of baptism, retired to the woods to pray as to how it should be administered. To quote now Joseph Smith's own language: "While we were thus employed,.... a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying unto us, 'Upon you, my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the priesthood of Aaron..!'" This priesthood had power to baptize, but not to confirm, but the angel promised that the higher priesthood should be given later. He stated also that he was acting under the direction of Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the priesthood of Melchisidec which in due time should be conferred. This was on May 15, 1829. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery baptized each other by authority of this priesthood, and by command of the angel. They baptized others, but did not yet attempt to effect a formal organization of the church. Then the word of the Lord came to them commanding them to ordain each other to the Melchisidec priesthood, but to defer that action until the approval and consent of their baptized brethren could be had. In still another experience, they were instructed by Peter, James, and John, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, as to how to proceed to ordain each other to the Melchisidec priesthood. Formal and legal organization of the church was then effected on April 6, 1830. The members consented to the ordination; the communion of the Lord's supper was observed, and then the ordinations were completed. The restoration of priesthood authority, by the command of God, through the ministry of the angel flying through the midst of heaven, was then complete.

All authority in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints can be traced directly back to this beginning experience. It is an authority which is blessed with the signs following, when its ministry is worthily extended and worthily received. We invite you again to share with us in the enjoyment of blessings and gifts which come from the ministry of an authoritative priesthood, called of God as was Aaron.