

The Duty and Calling of the Elders

by Elder Vim Horn

D&C 104:44a “Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence.”

The above scripture admonishes us as members of His holy priesthood to learn what our responsibilities are, and to then act upon this knowledge with all diligence. The scripture goes on to describe what will happen to our ability to stand in His stead if we are slothful in carrying out these responsibilities. Over the past ten years, because of our current scattered state and the need for ministry within our local branches, we as elders have focused a great deal of our energy and ministry at the local level. For some time now I have felt the prompting of the spirit to write an article to the Elders of the Church encouraging us to consider our duty as it relates to the condition of the entire Church.

When we look at what the Lord has shared with us through the scriptures about all aspects of our ministry, our responsibilities and opportunities become clear. Consider for a minute the implication of the following statement:

D&C 104:9a “The power and authority of the higher, or Melchisedec, priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church; to have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; to have the heavens opened unto them...”

Brethren, because of our calling, we hold within our faithful response the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the Church. Not some, but all. Not just within the context of a branch, but within the larger context of the Church. Certainly, the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven pertain to the church at large and not to any specific or select branch or congregation. The clear implication in this scripture is that our calling, as members of the Melchisidec priesthood, finds fulfillment within the larger context of the Church.

In D&C 41:1b-2b the Elders of the church are commanded to assemble to agree upon His word, to petition Him through faithful prayer to receive His law that we might know how to govern the Church. Again, in D&C 17:13 the Elders are directed to meet in conference once in three months, or as needed, for the purpose of doing whatever church business is to be done at the time. Both scriptures make it clear that the ministry of the Elder extends beyond the parochial considerations of a single branch.

So, as Elders, we have the duty and privilege to come together on a regular basis to consider the affairs and conditions of the Church. Now, we probably all recognize that coming together as an entire body of elders on a regular basis within our current scattered state carries with it a whole set of trust related issues, not to mention the associated logistical and resource challenges. Given these considerations, the obvious question then is what can we do, as Elders, to begin to address the broader aspects of our ministry?

Let me suggest an approach which some of you do, but not all. That is simply to commit that on a three-month basis the Elders within your branch, or several branches, if possible, come together for the express purpose of considering the affairs and spiritual condition of the Church. In this instance, considering the affairs of the Church does not mean to address specific organizational or policy development concerns. Rather, the primary reason for coming together would be to petition the Lord on behalf of the spiritual condition of the Church and the work. To spend concerted time in prayer and fasting asking the Lord to bless the Church spiritually, to reveal to us the mysteries of the Kingdom, to have the heavens opened to us, that we, as a body, might commune with those who reside there.

Additionally, the Elders should come together to agree upon his word. To gain, and agree upon a common understanding of the gospel and the Lord’s will. In these times when the Saints and Priesthood are being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,” there is tremendous need for us, as Elders, to come

together to agree upon the Lord's word. That as we go forth to teach and preach, a common message and direction will be shared. That through that commonality a sense of unity and oneness might result amongst the Saints.

It is my sincere belief that if we, as Elders, come together on a regular basis to do the things described above that the Lord will bless us and the Church in tremendous ways. Consider these promises that the Lord has given to us if we faithfully carry out all our responsibilities.

D&C 67:1a-b Behold, and hearken, 0 ye elders of my church, who have assembled yourselves together, whose prayers I have heard, and whose hearts I know, and whose desires have come up before me.

Behold, and lo, mine eyes are upon you; and the heavens and the earth are in mine hands, and the riches of eternity are mine to give.

D&C 42:1a-c Hearken, 0 ye elders of my church, who have assembled themselves together, in my name, even Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Savior of the world, inasmuch as they believe on my name and keep my commandments; again I say unto you, Hearken and hear and obey the law which I shall give unto you; for verily I say, As ye have assembled yourselves together according to the commandment wherewith I commanded you, and are agreed as touching this one thing, and have asked the Father in my name, even so ye shall receive.

It is the Lord's great desire to bless His priesthood and to bless his people through the priesthood. However, we must remain faithful to the conditions he has placed on these promises as reflected in the following scriptural example.

D&C 67:1c Ye endeavored to believe that ye should receive the blessing which was offered unto you, but, behold, verily, I say unto you, There were fears in your hearts; and verily this is the reason that ye did not receive.

How we go about fulfilling the work can in no way be separated from the final dispensation of the work. In fact, they are inseparably connected. If we attempt to share the gospel, or treat each other in less than a charitable manner, the end that is sought will never be attained. With this in mind, it is no surprise that most of the conditions placed on His promises pertain to some extent on our preparation, our personal conduct and how we conduct ourselves with one another. The Lord has extended to each of us the privilege of participating in his great work. However, this privilege carries with it associated responsibilities which must be addressed by each of us individually, as well as a collective body, if the full potential of the Lord's design is to be accomplished. A portion of these conditions are represented in the following scriptures.

D&C 67:3a, 3c And again, verily I say unto you, that it is your privilege, and a promise I give unto you that have been ordained unto this ministry, that inasmuch as you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am; ... wherefore continue in patience until ye are perfected.

D&C 119:2a-3a There is a great work to be done by mine elders, and that they may be fitted to do this work and the accomplishment thereof be not prevented, it is enjoined upon them that they shall not only be kind of heart and of a lowly spirit that their wisdom may be the wisdom of the Lord and their strength the strength of the Spirit, but they shall lay aside lightness of speech and lightness of manner when standing to declare the word, and shall study to approve their ministrations to the people by candor in speech and courtesy in demeanor, that as ministers of the gospel they may win souls unto Christ. The elders and men of the church should be of cheerful heart and countenance among themselves and in their intercourse with their neighbors and men of the world, yet they must be without blame in word and deed.

May God bless each of us as we faithfully respond to all aspects of our calling. That through our faithful response the people might be blessed, the work might go forward and God will be glorified here on earth as he is in heaven.