

Know Your Religion

Real Answers To Real Questions

APRIL 3, 2008

Blacks and the Priesthood

I have been asked the "Black and the Priesthood" question for many years. It wasn't until I was a mission president that the issue became much clearer. Let me begin (up front) by saying that I still don't understand all of the ramifications on "Why God gives Priesthood to some and not to others." However, I have explicit faith that He knows the reasons and when we eventually see as He sees, we'll be completely satisfied that what He has done has been the wisest thing to do.

Perhaps an example is the fastest way to teach how I handle the question. I was sitting in the Mission Home one Sunday afternoon waiting to leave for another Stake Conference. The telephone rang and the woman on the other end of the line explained that she was a Stake Missionary and had a Black investigator who wanted to talk with me about the "Black and the Priesthood" issue. I invited them over.

The investigator was working on a Master's degree and seemed to be very confident and articulate. After introductions he immediately attacked me with a barrage of questions. "Why are you prejudiced against Blacks?" he asked. "I didn't know I was!" was my reply. He said: "Don't play mind games with me. I understand you have a doctorate degree and I am fairly educated myself, so let's get to the meat of the issue. Until 1978 Mormons withheld the Priesthood from the Blacks and I want to know why?" He was just assertive enough to kindle my combative spirit a little—it wasn't like a bash session but more a spirited exchange.

I said: "You seem to be rather bold in coming into my home and attacking me. Would it be alright if I asked you some questions?" He agreed. I asked him what his definition of the Priesthood was. He replied that it was his understanding that it was "the power of God...." and then he continued on. I stopped him and said, "Can we just agree that the Priesthood is the power of God?" He agreed. I asked him if he thought the priesthood was a real power to which he responded in the negative. Then I followed with a rather incredulous question: "Why, then, are you upset with the Mormons keeping a 'non-real thing' away from your people?" He didn't know what to say.

I continued. "For sake of discussion, let's assume the Priesthood is a real thing. Who then would control it?" He answered: "Well, I guess God would since it is His power." I asked: "Does He have to account to you on why He does what He does?" To which he recoiled and answered: "Certainly not. That would border on blasphemy!" to which I agreed.

Then I asked who held the Priesthood during Old Testament times after the Exodus. He rather proudly demonstrated his understanding that it was only the Tribe of Levi. I asked: "Would you show me in the Old Testament where the other 11 tribes, which include Judah—through whom the Savior was to be born, and Joseph—the new chosen, birthright son, picketed up and down in front of the Tabernacle demanding the Priesthood?" He admitted that he couldn't and stated that he had never looked at it quite like that before. I suggested that God has always "discriminated" with regard to who could hold the priesthood.

Then I decided to help him see discrimination from a different perspective. I

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said: "Since you brought it up, let's talk discrimination for a minute. Up until June 8, 1978 a Black could be a member of the Church, have the Holy Ghost, partake of the sacrament, and serve in the Church in whatever capacity that didn't require the Priesthood. They could be administered to, receive blessings, etc. The instant they died they could have their names submitted to the temple for temple work because there was no reference on the form as to race. Therefore, all the blessings of not only Salvation (which come from Baptism and the Holy Ghost) were available to them, but also the blessings of Exaltation (which require Priesthood for the males and temple endowments and sealings), were also available. However, they could not become "sons of perdition" because the unpardonable sin had to be committed before the dissolution of the body." Since I had just been studying it, I knew the reference, so I excused myself and retrieved my copy of the Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith where Joseph taught: "A man cannot commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body, and there is a way possible for escape. Knowledge saves a man; and in the world of spirits no man can be exalted but by knowledge. So long as a man will not give heed to the commandments, he must abide without salvation. If a man has knowledge, he can be saved; although, if he has been guilty of great sins, he will be punished for them. But when he consents to obey the Gospel, whether here or in the world of spirits, he is saved.

"A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. Hence the saying, They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man.

"I know the Scriptures and understand them. I said, no man can commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body, nor in this life, until he receives the Holy Ghost but they must do it in this world. Hence the salvation of Jesus Christ was wrought out for all men, in order to triumph over the devil; for if it did not catch him in one place, it would in another; for he stood up as a Savior. All will suffer until they obey Christ himself."

(Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.357)

I continued: "So up until June 8, 1978, only a white, Melchizedek Priesthood bearing male could be come a son of perdition. Now thanks be to the Lord, since 1978, you too can become a son of perdition." I thought he was turning pale white in front of me.

He stammered a little and said: "I had never looked at it that way before!" I assured him that most people hadn't. Then I turned to the Sister Stake Missionary who had brought the Black investigator, and said to her: "Up until this very day, God is still discriminating against 50% of His children in not allowing them to hold the priesthood-- they are women. But (I continued), I vote that women can also hold the priesthood and they too can become sons of perdition!" By this time their entire demeanor had changed.

I concluded by explaining that God's stated objective for not only mankind in general but for each individual son or daughter was to give them immortality and eternal life (see Moses 1:39), and that God assured us in 2 Nephi 26:24: "He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation." As our belief in and trust of God increases, we are more content to allow Him to be God and us to be His children.

I then explained that mortality (when viewed in God's time, which is that one day with God is equivalent to 1000 years with man—Abraham 3:4) if we lived for 72 years would only constitute a one hour 43 minute and 41 second test away from God. That we had lived with God for countless years before coming here and the God had designed our mortal existence so that, if we would take advantage of it, the time and the condition under which we were born and lived out our lives would enhance our quest for exaltation faster than any other that could possibly be. Therefore, by trying to dictate

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to God what should happen to us, what powers we should hold, etc. we were actually demonstrating our lack of faith in God's plan for us and placing ourselves in a position of superiority to God—which is blasphemy. The conversation ended on a very congenial note with the Sister Stake Missionary forcefully declining to accept the responsibility of the priesthood and gratefully being content to enjoy the blessings of the Priesthood—just as the Blacks had before 1978.

You see, it isn't really an issue of the Black and the Priesthood or anything else. The question is, do we trust God to do the very best for us He possibly can without destroying our agency nor giving us too much too fast and thus enabling us to destroy ourselves.

I hope this short explanation will give you some ideas to help all people, no matter what color to understand a little more about how God lovingly works with His children for their salvation and exaltation.

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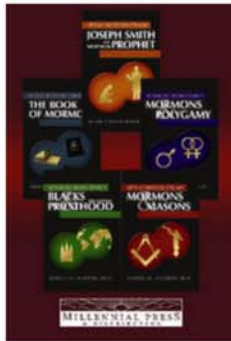
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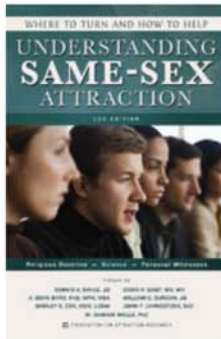
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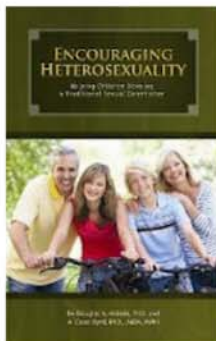
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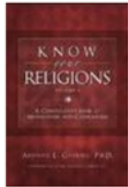
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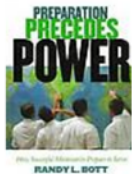
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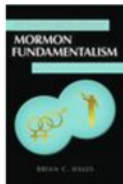
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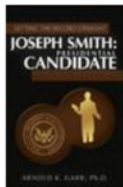
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