

I HAVE CHOSEN YOU

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SCRIPTURE: John 15:15-21

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. You 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; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

Although Jesus Christ at all times claimed and exercised the privileges and prerogatives of Deity, boldly claiming to be the Son of God, yet it is also true that he was always careful to impress upon his followers that he was one sent -- that he did nothing in his own strength or in his own wisdom, but by the will of his Father in heaven. "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God," Jesus said. (John 3:34) "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." (John 14:10) "I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." (John 8:42) These and several other scriptures make it plain that Jesus regarded himself as one sent, one who depended for his authority upon his heavenly Father.

Paul understood very well that Jesus drew his authority from God, for he used Jesus as an example of the principle laid down in Hebrews 5:4,5: "No man taketh this honor (the honor of priesthood authority) unto himself but he that is called of God as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee."

The apostles were "those sent," not those who themselves decided to go. Jesus sought them out at their work, and called them to come and follow him. None of them sought him out, or applied to him for the position. The tenth chapter of Matthew is the account of his commission and instruction to them, in which he tells them where to go, what to say, how they shall be equipped, and the kind of treatment they may expect to receive. Jesus said to them, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." (John 15:16)

In a fervent prayer for his apostles whom he had chosen, ordained, and sent, Jesus said to his Father: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." (John 17:18) In this sentence Jesus confesses again that he was sent into the world by the Father, and says that in the same manner the apostles are sent into the world by his authority derived from the Father. The apostles did not choose to go until God had taken the initiation and called them through his Son, the highest priesthood authority on earth. He even went so far as to say that they should take no thought what to say when brought before governors and kings, "for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak: for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." (Matt. 10:20)

Even more specific is the commission Jesus gave to Peter, and through him to the twelve, in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew: "I will give unto thee the keys of the

kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, . . . etc. John 20:23 enlarges on this commission by quoting other words from Jesus: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

The authority and the miraculous powers specifically given to the apostles under Jesus' commission were not confined to the original twelve apostles, nor were they even confined exclusively to apostles. Matthew 10:1 says: "He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." The 8th chapter of Acts records that Philip, the evangelist, who was not an apostle at all, cast out unclean spirits, and performed other miracles. The apostolic succession was continued when Matthias was chosen to fill Judas' place; and later we read that Barnabas and Saul, or Paul, were ordained apostles. (Acts 13:2,3, with Acts 14:14) Paul, the apostle, but not one of the original twelve, restored Eutychus to life after he had fallen from a third story window, and did many other miracles which are recorded in the book of Acts.

The powers of priesthood were intended to remain in the church "till we, in the unity of the faith, all come to 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..." (Eph. 4:13,14) The spiritual gifts which are ministered through priesthood, were to remain in the church (according to I Cor. 13:10) until "that which is perfect is come" or in other words, until Christ's return makes spiritual gifts no longer necessary.

Latter Day Saints firmly believe that calls to priesthood responsibility must come from God, for "No man taketh this honor unto himself save he be called of God, as was Aaron." Aaron did not receive the call himself. The call came through Moses, the prophet of God. Calls to priesthood come through the prophetic ministry which is already set in the church. No man may take priesthood unto himself of his own volition. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you."

Paul frequently refers to the church as the "body of Christ." He says that God hath set certain officers in the church, and names prophets, apostles, teachers, gifts, helps, miracles. When food is taken into the physical body, it is not the food which decides how it is to be assimilated, or into which organ or cell it is to be built. The spirit, or the directing life of the body, determines that. And once the food is absorbed and becomes a living part of some organ or member, it is still the directing life and spirit of the body which dictates its action. So it is when priesthood is called, commissioned, and set in the church. It is not the man himself who decides what office he would like to hold, or where he would like to work, or what actions he would like to perform, but the directing Life of the body, which is the Spirit of Christ, manifested through the authoritative, prophetic ministry already functioning in the church. "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." (John 7:18) "A man can receive nothing (margin: take unto himself nothing) except it be given him from heaven." (John 3:27)

When any man presumptuously assumes priesthood, or presumes to speak and act in the name of God without being called and commissioned and set in the church by the life-giving, directing Spirit which enlivens the body of Christ, that man has cut himself off from the body of Christ. And since "without me ye can do nothing," since there is no life unless we abide in the vine, or in the body, we are spiritually dead. Apostasy always brings spiritual death. Careless failure or rebellious refusal to obey the Spirit of God always brings loss of spiritual authority, and loss of the power which must rightfully accompany such authority.

The bold but reasonable claim of Joseph Smith, the nineteenth century prophet, was that because of such transgression and apostasy, priesthood had ceased to exist on earth; but that through the ministry of the risen Christ and his angelic messengers, priesthood was restored to earth, where it functions in Christ's church as it did in new testament times. And in that restored church and restored priesthood, no man takes its honors or responsibilities to himself unless he be called of God as was Aaron. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." Christ was sent; he did not go of his own will and volition; and "The servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." (John 13:15)