

231.1: The Restoration of the Priesthood (D&C Gospel Doctrine Lesson 8, Updated)

The Restoration of the Priesthood

Manual Goal: To increase class members' appreciation for the restoration of the priesthood, to encourage brethren to magnify their offices and callings in the priesthood, and to help all members enjoy more fully the blessings of the priesthood.

EGD Goal: To support class members in strengthening the foundation for a resilient testimony of the gospel.

- I. Framing
- II. Discussion of New Resources
- III. How dominoes can become stumbling blocks
- IV. Theological tools: Differentiation and Primacy
- V. Priesthood Presuppositions
- VI. Greater than
- VII. Conclusion

Framing: The purpose of this lesson is to strengthen our testimony of the restoration of the priesthood/gospel. The challenge is, when you look at this argument from other perspectives, it can backfire. Our curriculum often employs dominoes: (if A, then B, then C, then D, then E...). I remember the sequence right in the First Missionary Discussion: If the Book of Mormon is true, Joseph Smith is a prophet. If Joseph Smith is a prophet, the LDS Church is God's kingdom on earth. If the LDS Church is God's kingdom on earth, you should get baptized.

The problem with dominoes is that if one falls, they all risk collapse. I propose replacing dominoes with a hierarchy.

Theological tools: Differentiation and Primacy.

Differentiation: The domino approach links gospel principles in a sequence, but we can separate them out again. Past. History. Theology. Institution. Lived Religion.

Primacy: Some principles are bigger/more foundational than others. For years during grad school I sifted out the principles of the gospel that I felt were most important. Which held up the others? Which principles helped resolve contradictions? For example, very early on I wrestled with the issues of situatedness and epistemology...

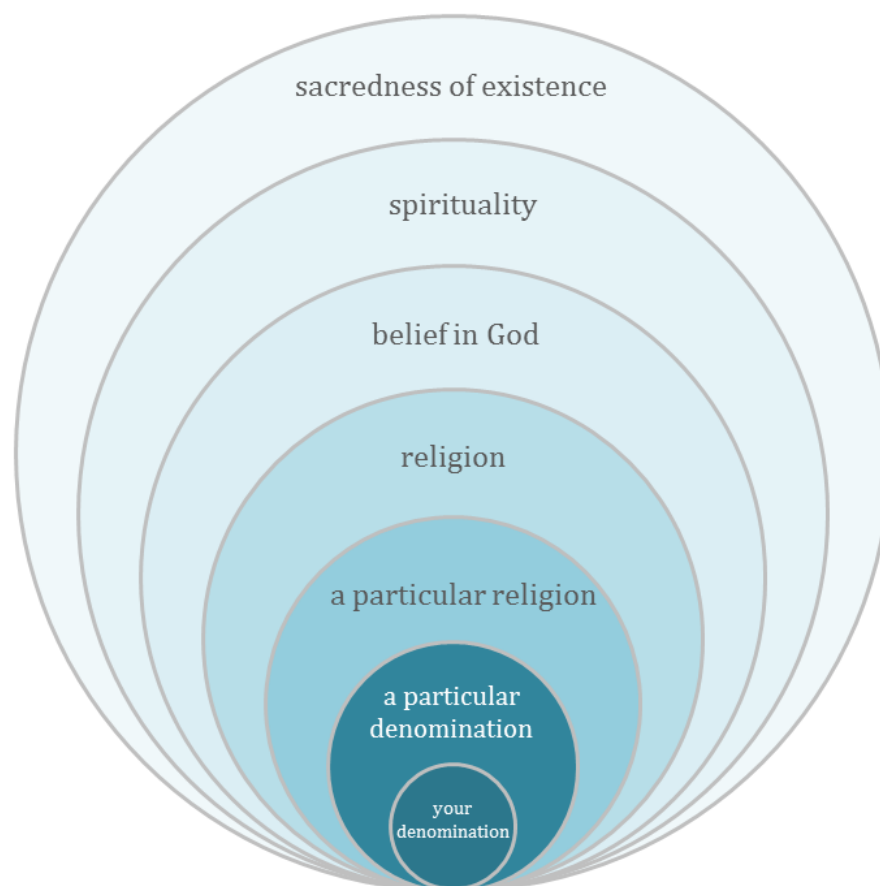
For example, it is more important that we understand and are able to apply revelation than that it be perfectly accurate in a way we couldn't understand. Thus applicability > accuracy. The question of theodicy seeks to understand how God could be all powerful, all knowing, and all loving. Mormon doctrine teaches that agency and the goal of becoming like our Heavenly Parents is more important than lack of suffering.

Let's look at the restoration of the priesthood narrative and work our way back.

1. Joseph Smith had authority to act in the name of God
2. This authority came through the priesthood
3. Joseph received this priesthood authority from Peter, James, and John (and other keys from other figures)
4. Peter, James, and John had this priesthood authority
5. Peter, James, and John received this priesthood authority from Jesus
6. Jesus established priesthood authority during his lifetime

(and all this is based on the position that God grants authority in a specific way)

So what do we do when we have questions about any part of this narrative? I suggest we anchor ourselves more deeply.



So what? What's the point of all this? I personally find the payoff to be significant: We can hold to our testimonies, believe what we feel/have been convinced is true, but those testimonies will be healthier and more resilient by being anchored as deeply as possible.

New Resources

[Lesson 8: The Restoration of the Priesthood](#)

- [“Oliver Cowdery’s Gift”](#): This article gives context for the revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 13.
- [Priesthood Restoration Site](#): A series of articles, maps, and other content helps visitors learn more about Harmony Township, Pennsylvania, where priesthood authority was restored.
- [“Ministry of Joseph Smith: The Restoration of Priesthood Authority”](#): This one-minute video introduces the priesthood restoration. Links to lots of videos. Looks nice, pretty standard.
- [“Joseph Smith’s Teachings about Priesthood, Temple, and Women”](#): This Gospel Topics essay gives an overview of Joseph Smith’s teachings involving the priesthood and women. Good intro: “Women and men enjoy many opportunities for service in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, both within local congregations and at the Churchwide level. Among other things, Latter-day Saint women preach sermons in Sunday meetings and the Church’s general conference; serve full-time proselytizing missions; perform and officiate in holy rites in the Church’s temples; and lead organizations that minister to families, other women, young women, and children. They participate in priesthood councils at the local and general levels. Professional women teach Latter-day Saint history and theology at Church universities and in the Church’s educational programs for youth. Because only men are ordained to priesthood office, however, questions have arisen about women’s standing in the Church.” I approve of the emphasis on cultural context: “many Latter-day Saints initially understood the concept of priesthood largely in terms common for the day. In 1830s America, the word *priesthood* was defined as “the office or character of a priest” and “the order of men set apart for sacred offices,” identifying priesthood with religious office and the men who held it.³ Early Latter-day Saints likewise thought of priesthood primarily in terms of ordination to ecclesiastical office and authority to preach and perform religious rites.⁴ As in most other Christian denominations during this era, Latter-

day Saint men alone held priesthood offices, served formal proselytizing missions, and performed ordinances like baptism and blessing the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.”

Interesting wording about the Relief Society: “ As Sarah Granger Kimball, a founding member of the Relief Society, later recalled, the Prophet told them he had “something better” for them and said he would organize the women “in the Order of the Priesthood after the pattern of the Church.”¹⁶” The essay then clarifies that this ambiguous wording should not be interpreted as meaning women have priesthood authority.

- [Daughters in My Kingdom, chapter 8](#): This chapter gives an overview of Joseph Smith’s teachings involving the priesthood and women. Not a fan of this framing, but it is complicated to do better (Look forward to our episode on the priesthood where we discuss the relationship of the priesthood and women) “Heavenly Father’s worthy sons are ordained to priesthood offices and are assigned specific duties and responsibilities. They are authorized to act in His name to look after His children and to help them receive ordinances and make and honor covenants. All Heavenly Father’s sons and daughters are equally blessed as they draw upon the power of the priesthood.”
- [“Race and the Priesthood”](#): This Gospel Topics essay discusses the history of the racial restrictions on priesthood, which were Church policy from the 1850s until 1978. [Starts positive—God loves and embraces all their children. The Church encourages racial integration. Acknowledges the problems for both men and women \(forbidden access to both priesthood and temple ordinances\). Most importantly and helpfully, this essay clearly frames the restriction in terms of cultural contexts and prejudice.](#) “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was [restored](#) amidst a highly contentious racial culture in which whites were afforded great privilege.”“There is no reliable evidence that any black men were denied the priesthood during Joseph Smith’s lifetime.” [One of the closest wordings to a repudiation I have seen:](#) “Over time, Church leaders and members advanced many theories to explain the priesthood and temple restrictions. None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church.”
- [“Witnessing the Faithfulness”](#): This article discusses the experiences of a few black members of the Church in the United States, Brazil, and Ghana leading up to and just after the 1978 revelation that once again extended the priesthood to worthy men of African descent. [Props for putting this issue in the context of slavery and imperialism. The temple prohibition is framed in terms of racism, as it should be. Glad it has the wording “priesthood and temple restriction” which illustrates the true scope. Then come the inspiring stories. Good resource.](#)