Concerning Jesus Christ, who may be termed his Father’s disciple, it is said that through Him was the Father “manifested” to the world. In other language, the virtues, the disposition, and the character of the unseen Father were manifested in the life and conduct of the Son, who had studied Him, practiced Him, and was then acting Him out; so that all who wanted to see what kind of person the Father was could behold Him in the words and actions of the Son.

For this same purpose were we ordained before the foundation of the world, when many of us received the priesthood by ordination, and by decree the promise that we should inherit it in the flesh. In this promise was conveyed the condition that we should walk not merely in the authority of the appointment, but in the virtues and qualities that are its necessary accompaniments.

The ages of our probation in the spirit world have rolled away; we are inhabitants of the flesh; and, according to promise, the priesthood has descended upon us, through the hands of our brethren, who led us once before in heavenly councils above. The authority to be the Father’s representatives has been given us, and the legality of our administrators has been acknowledged on high. But whether we are the Father’s representatives beyond holding his authority remains yet to be seen.

One thing is certain — Divine Authority alone is not sufficient to make us representatives of God. Some men possess that, but nothing else. There is scarcely an attribute of Almighty God about them. They walk in the authority of their appointment, but not in the virtue, the grace, or the righteousness of it. Strip such men of their authority, and there is nothing of God left to be counted. They may be successful managers, wise economists, and excellent teachers of the things of God, because the faith of their associates and the Saints draws the Spirit down upon them and yet, otherwise, they have scarcely an enduring quality of righteousness in their possession.

Why, then, are they called to fill certain positions in the Priesthood? For a very good reason; God requires a certain kind of business done, and they are able to do it. They are taken on trial; but it is not thereby proved or affirmed, because they have certain gifts and powers, which it suits the Lord to use, that therefore they are really representing the Almighty, or advancing themselves towards celestial life. It may suit a gentleman to employ a man to preside over his workmen who are building him a house; but it is not thereby shown that that man, as a necessary consequence, is getting sufficiently refined or educated to live and associate with that gentleman in the house, after it is finished.

Neither does faithfulness or energy in carrying out the external duties of our callings prove we are getting nearer the Almighty, or progressing towards celestial perfection. Fidelity in carrying out any Church business that may be entrusted to us is an indispensable requisite; and a man would be damned who did not possess it; but indispensable as it is, it is not a very wonderful acquirement. It is so little an affair, that, viewed in the light of celestial principles, a man would be scouted [observed & evaluated] who did not possess such a very, very first principle of gospel life, and many other good qualities into the bargain.

Any sectarian — any member of a mere party in politics would consider himself a poor tool, if fidelity to his party and energy in the business belonging thereto formed his greatest acquirement. Anybody and everybody worth mentioning in any little system is supposed to be capable of that. Shall, then, the priesthood, whose aim is endless life — whose ambition is the perfection of the Godhead and its glories, — shall they consider that they meet the demands of God upon them, simply because they are faithful to truth, obedient to orders, or willing to support by their means the religion of their choice? As God lives, we may do all this, and have it done apparently well, too, and then be no better than any sectarian who sincerely believes his faith and earnestly upholds it. The highest principles of righteousness, that give grace, beauty, and dignity to the character, and that live and burn in our exalted Father, may have to be begun in us after this is done; or, if it begun, the foundation only may be laid. If we came into the church aright, with a reformed character, of course we laid a foundation, but what is the use of that, except as a foundation? We are called to be exemplifiers of the very virtues of the eternal God. Jehovah’s principles should shine in us, so that, seeing us, He may be seen. If we are content to be less than this we are shams, instead of a royal and holy Priesthood. He who only represents God’s authority, bare of his goodness and his truth, is but a poor apology for a Priest of the Most High God.

When a man is called to the priesthood, he is then and there ordained to put down evil. He is not merely called to form part of a splendid organization. That organization is principally valuable because it is so well adapted to enable the Almighty and his servants to spread and keep alive the influences of the Holy Ghost, communicate their will to men, and carry out their purposes.

We are not called simply that God may have a number of men called Priests upon the earth. No. The holy Priesthood has been conferred on us for the express purpose that the Father and Son may have representatives of their Spirit and their actions upon the earth. We are ordained and appointed to act them out. The world are to comprehend God through us. As God was said to be “written in the face of Jesus Christ,” so he is to be told out and made plain in our words and ways.

Godliness is not going to be loved, understood, or appreciated by the world, by the preaching of a cold theory of its nature. We have got to make them feel God by the force of his very nature diffused in us. “Holy Father,” said Jesus, “the world hath not known thee”; but, says John, “the Son who hath dwelt in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Such is our position in regard to God, if we really possess the Spirit as well as the authority of the Priesthood; we also are decliners of the Most High.

The heavenly authorities of the upper worlds, whose glorious characters shine white, and pure, and free, and innocent, and whose virtues have lifted them up to their high estate, have stooped to attach us to their ranks. They have delegated us to support by their means the religion of their choice? As God lives, we may do all this, and have it done apparently well, too, and then be no better than any sectarian who sincerely believes his faith and earnestly upholds it. The highest principles of righteousness, that give grace, beauty, and dignity to the character, and that live and burn in our exalted Father, may have to be begun in us after this is done; or, if it begun, the foundation only may be laid. If we came into the church aright, with a reformed character, of course we laid a foundation, but what is the use of that, except as a foundation? We are called to be exemplifiers of the very virtues of the eternal God. Jehovah’s principles should shine in us, so that, seeing us, He may be seen. If we are content to be less than this we are shams, instead of a royal and holy Priesthood. He who only represents God’s authority, bare of his goodness and his truth, is but a poor apology for a Priest of the Most High God.
heavenly laws — by the practice of principles that work peace and goodwill within the bosom, they have called us not merely to preach principles, but to let their principles live in us.

To carry out these views, Eternal Wisdom has devised a glorious Church organization to exist among men. Some men actually seem to think that to get working this grand system of powers and authorities on the earth is the principal thing amid all by God, and the principal thing worth rejoicing about. Hence they glorify themselves immensely over the wondrous power and increasing influence of the organization. They are very proud of it, and are anxious to roll it on. But they do not seem to care a straw about the internal principles of their religion, and scarcely appear to know that they exist. They do not appear to see that this glorious order of Priesthood, with the authority accompanying it, is but so much machinery created to bring forth, cherish, and establish on earth the virtues and characteristics of the upper worlds, and that the priesthood is established solely, wholly, and entirely that it may work to that end.

And as, in establishment of the latter-day dispensation, the great thing aimed at was not merely the erection of a gigantic, almighty organization, that should awe the world and rule it with an iron rod; so, as far as we are individually concerned, the great thing, the ruling desire with us should not be merely the getting distinction in that Priesthood, either by ordination or appointment, only so far as we make that a means towards the same great purpose that exists in the Almighty — namely, the celestialization of the world by the introduction of celestial practices in ourselves and others. We cannot think that our ordinances or appointments have necessarily advanced us one particle towards celestial life, only so far as we have made them do it, by taking advantage of the right opportunities and get an insight into the real sources of celestial life. Ordinations do not celestialize; appointments do not elevate; they only authorize us to be channels of light to others and to ourselves, if we will. Our present standing in the Priesthood, therefore, does not necessarily represent our progress in salvation, although there will come a day when it will; for eternal authority will, finally, only be vested where the eternal attributes of God exist. But under the present state of things, if the whole world were ordained Apostles, that in itself would not make it a whit more heavenly; that alone would not bring it forward towards celestial life; it would only put the means within its reach. It takes intelligence, ruled by meekness, benevolence, justice, mercy, and uprightness in spirit and in deed, to celestialize. They will refine; and refinement of this class is celestialization. The Priesthood, with its authority and order, is a glorious framework, destined to guard and nourish these principles, and to bring them to maturity and perfection.

The Almighty, then, has only given to us the naked priesthood. The virtues, the graces — in a word, the power of it, we have to get ourselves. We have to clothe it and make it beautiful. A plentiful store, however, through the intelligence revealed, lies close to our hands to do it with. Let us arise and shine, and let old sterile priestcraft and those that live under its influence see our light. And let us live so in the purity of our religion — in the immaculate integrity of all its principles, till our every presence is a poison to the wicked, and misery to the corrupt in heart. No testimony against evil can be given with power by any man who is under the influence of that evil. A heart that is pure from selfishness or greed can roll out thunders against those particular sins; and so with all the rest. Appointments and ordinations cannot confer ability to testify properly against the popular sins of this generation. To be a real disciple and representative of Jesus Christ, bearing witness against the sins of the age, we must be clean every whit. Then from the depths of a pure soul will come a testimony that will burn where it goes, and condemn where it is rejected.

This, then, is true priesthood — to be images of the living God, exhibiting in our characteristics His brightness and His strength; to be girl and endowed with the purity of His nature; to be unsullied in heart and mind; to stand by the strength of redeeming, saving qualities; to bless, and bless, and bless again, notwithstanding ingratitude in some — building, sustaining, and protecting all the time; to fight all spirits of division and all principles of death; to help the weak, the down-trodden, and the helpless, till helping becomes our natural food, working on all principles that yield nourishment, support, and strength — till our very presence is as the sun, cheering and blessing all. So shall God increase within us, refreshing our own spirits, and watering all around, and the characteristics of the Holy Priesthood will grow out from us like the branches of a fruitful tree that yield shelter, shield, and fruit.

Let a man do this, and he shall be a priest indeed. His authority shall be like a two-edged sword. It shall be confirmed on him for all eternity; for God shall love him and shall bless him. His heart shall increase in richness, and his mind shall grow in strength. No good thing shall be withheld from him. He shall save and gain influence over the hearts of men. He shall be as God among his own; and they shall feel the attributes that live within him, till their hearts are stolen from them and linked to him forever. So shall he gain dominion, and increase in strength, and be really, truly, and eternally a representative of the Most High.