

Ephesians 4:1-16 (Christopher James Davis) 211509

Basics for Believers, Chapter 4: Christian Ministry-Its Source, Object, Relationship, and Directorship

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Read Ephesians 4:1-16

God is a God of order; and that saint is unwise who refuses it. If we attempt to substitute our own it simply amounts to disorder. If we refuse His, it is rebellion. Now, in this fourth of Ephesians, you will find the order in which God brings truth before us. In the 1st verse the Apostle beseeches the saints at Ephesus (and is it not for us also?) to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called (vocation means calling).

The calling is given in the earlier part of the epistle. Let us glance at it.

1. In Ephesians 1, for instance, you will see the individual standing of every believer intimated; and hence the Apostle, in the 3rd verse, blesses "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in CHRIST."

Mark that; it is not only the thought that God is willing to bless, neither is it God meeting man's need merely. God, as meeting man's need, is shown us in the epistle to the Romans, but in Ephesians God meets His own need, if with reverence I may so say. That need of God is to have a people for the praise and glory of His grace; and this is what He has done. Now, in order thereto, He takes up poor, ruined, undone ones, and sets them in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus {Eph. 2:6}. The Apostle Paul knows no questioning as to who every believer is. From each of such goes the language; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed", etc. So in this portion you see that the individual standing of every believer is in the new creation in Christ Jesus. Indeed, how could the God of divine holiness look upon such vile good-for-nothings as we, and speak of us as being "holy and without blame before Him," if He had not "chosen us IN CHRIST"?

Just leave out the expression "in Christ", and you charge God with unholiness in speaking thus of us. Let the mind grasp the fullness of the value of Christ, and let faith accept God's statements, that HE sees the believer according to God's estimate of the BLESSED ONE, and at once the soul has peace with and joy in God; and only from such can God the Father derive worship and praise. We, then, are the object of God's choice; and we have been chosen in Christ, in order that God—His eyes on Christ—might see us holy and without blame before Him. Such is our standing. Let me remind you that we are not here represented as blameless in ourselves. The contrary is the case, as shown in the word. Whatever my blessing may be, my bad nature remains unchangeably the same. Nevertheless, by the death of Christ not only were our sins put away, but ourselves also from before God; as truly the stock as the branches. God condemned sin in the flesh {Rom. 8:3}. Hence Paul declares, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). "Our old man is crucified with Him" (Rom. 6:6).

Now, if God must have sons adopted unto Himself, such sons must be in His sight without blame. Hence, He wisely and graciously chooses us in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

How long, dear brethren, would our peace last if it depended on what we were in our own sight? How would it be with the most devout if feelings were criteria of our acceptance with God? Ever blessed be His name! He has placed us in a higher atmosphere than doubts can touch—encircled us with defenses through which no enemy can break. He sees us in Christ. We are "accepted in the beloved." There may our faith rest; may our walk and deportment be responsive to such a position. The first constituent in my vocation, then, is to know, by the Holy Ghost, my personal or individual relationship to God. He is my Father, He is my God (John 20:17). This knowledge, accepted by the soul as a divine fact, must precede every inquiry respecting ministry, for such is God's order.

2. But although such personal standing be owned, a believer might act very independently, as we say, if he were still ignorant of another item in the revelation regarding his vocation.

Now, I am deeply convinced that either unbelief as to this, or self-will in not acting upon the divine fact, is a very important element in the church's failure today. Has nothing new happened since Pentecost? Is there nothing that specially marks God's honor for His beloved Son? Most decidedly. "The church, which is His (Christ's) body," has been formed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost {1 Cor. 12:13}; and we being in it, and of it, are mutually related to each other in a way never previously known.

If a body has been formed, then

(a) There must be a head; and such Christ became in His resurrection¹ (Eph. 1:19-23);

(b) There needs provision for its unity, and this is just what the presence in it of the HOLY GHOST implies (1 Cor. 12:13);

(c) It will require nutritive organs for the growth and maintenance of its several members; and ministry for this has been provided;

(d) One body will have only one system of organs for the whole; then the members suffer where the oneness is not acted upon practically; moreover, the ministers belong to the "one body";

(e) But unless all such organs (the ministers) are responsive to impressions from one center, one head, there must be necessarily much incoordination of movements and no little confusion. Hence the necessity of knowing the corporate relationship in which we stand to each

other; that thus, by the power of the Holy Ghost, we might honestly endeavor to “walk worthy of our vocation.” And it is futile to engage the thoughts with ministry until such divine facts—I do not say doctrines—are acknowledged by the saints.

It is perfectly true that the servant is responsible to Christ as his Lord and Master; and hence he is not to be trammelled in any way by the church. This we shall see by and by. But I do think that he is to be pitied who cannot observe, in God’s order, in developing the truth, the mutual relationships of the members of the body, the gifts included.

(3) Observe, further, that the truth about the body, as God’s habitation through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22), precedes the teaching as to ministry. If the Spirit dwells in the body (here it is not the individual, but the whole church, the “holy temple”),

(a) The saints should accept it as a FACT, as much so as when the Lord Himself was upon earth; as truly so as if they saw the Holy Ghost, and they should depend upon Him for all they need.

Can He not (as God) qualify any member to whom the Lord gives the grace? Can He not use whom He will for edifying the assembly?

Many wonder, what are we to do if there be no ministry in any one place? Here is the answer—Depend upon the presence of the Holy Ghost. Is He certainly in the temple? Then He is sufficient for ordering it. Of course the truth regarding ministry comes out afterwards; but the Holy Ghost, at the very threshold, challenges our reliance on Himself before permitting us to see the ministers. Splendid order this is, beloved friends! Do you admire it? Can your souls worship God for it? Or would you prefer to have the ministers first, the Holy Ghost supplying their deficiencies? Let us be honest and truthful to God. We cannot deceive Him. Is the presence of the Holy Ghost enough?

(b) Let the soul be well instructed regarding the directorship of the Holy Ghost, and then the ministers will exercise their gift “unto edification” in absolute subjection to Him. But He directs for the good of the whole body, therefore every minister acting in subjection to the Holy Ghost is a servant of Christ to ALL. He knows nothing of sectarianism. Our pattern man, Paul, knew well the “one body” and the “one Spirit,” and his conduct respected the one as his service was in subjection to the other.

(4) In Ephesians 3 also we find another preliminary to the disclosure of the truth respecting the ministry. I allude to the prayer of the Apostle, that we may know the love of Christ which surpasseth knowledge. Mark well, it is not to know love to, but the love of Christ; it is to understand His love. Now, do you remember one prominent characteristic of His love, one which no one else before, nor since, has evinced? It was unselfishness. You see it in ten thousand shades if you possess the divine power for perceiving it. He is disturbed in His repose by the fearful unbelief of His disciples, and is taunted with not caring for them (Mark 4:37-40). Does He chide? Oh no; “He arose and rebuked the wind and the sea,” which was enough to prick tender consciences, but He did not chide with the disciples. He sits by the well of Sychar, and is wearied after a long journey, and fatigued by a scorching tropical sun. Will He command a quiet resting-place and retire from service? Not as long as there was a poor despised Samaritan woman to bless. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” O may every servant of His imitate such a master! But what shall we say of the love which could lead Him to set aside His glory, to come to earth at all, and then to go to the cross? To serve others during His brief sojourn on earth, and to give His life a ransom for many—“To serve and to give” were the objects of His life. Was ever love like His?

I suppose it will be admitted that we learn more by imitation than by reading, and in a most insensible manner too. A child speaks what it hears its teachers say, and applies terms to certain objects as it finds its parents use them. Now, the custom of many now-a-days is, to say to every newborn soul in Christ, “Go and work for the Lord.” Hence, we hear no small amount of “preaching”, but we may well say, in innumerable cases, “They desire to be teachers ... understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim. 1:7).

The fact is that the Holy Ghost detains everyone in the anteroom, so to say, and engages Him with the person of Christ.

To talk about Him from what others say is to misrepresent Him, and to damage the soul of the speaker; to trade with what others write is dishonesty; to take the place of an “ambassador,” without being long in HIS company, is to be false to the One you assume to represent.

I would, beloved brethren, that the field of harvest to our blessed Lord were filled with reapers. Does He not deserve every soul in this country? Is He not worthy of ten thousand times ten thousand more than such as now His grace receive? He is indeed! But has He given up His right to use what and whom He will? Does He not bless His own truth read even in the midst of the most revolting superstition? Who can say that, even in the Vatican, souls are not led to Himself by so much of His word as is read? But the end {objective} of an act does not justify the wrong motive which prompted it, nor the bad manner in which it was done. God is sovereign, and can use what is of Himself for blessing to others. He speaks well of Rahab’s faith, but did He approve her lie? He overruled the wrath of the sons of Jacob, and preserved to them a Saviour for a time of dearth, but who will be bold enough to excuse the envy of Joseph’s brethren? I say, therefore, that the Lord as Sovereign does overrule much ignorance and self-will and get praise to Himself in His own gracious way, but this is no mitigation of the rashness of any who intrude themselves into so sacred a place as the ministry, who have not known Christ’s love, which passeth knowledge—to be filled into the fullness of God. Is this part of the vocation? Certainly it is. We are not only called to know where God has been pleased to set us; but our spiritual capacity has to be enlarged to learn Christ. Hence, in the previous part of the prayer, the Apostle desires for us that we may be able to comprehend, with all saints, lengths, depths, breadths, and heights; of what? He does not say. The fact is that, in Ephesians, we get a vast expanse of God’s grace put before us, to scan which is our privilege, but for which we need something far beyond mere intellect. The Holy Ghost must expand the mind and enlarge the heart.

Now, before one word is said respecting ministry, these soul-stirring truths are given for our acceptance. They are truths, you perceive, that concern the glory of the Lord Jesus—of far higher moment to each believer than the doctrine as to ministry. Not that I would derogate the latter, beloved; God forbid! But I would press on you all, as on myself, the divine fact that the person of Christ, as a living man in heaven (of course, God withal, blessed forever!) for saints to love, to learn, and to be obedient unto—is of far greater moment than the mere learning of doctrines as “articles of our belief.” Moreover, the submission to Christ as LORD is considerably more precious to God than all the service performed without reference to His glory. Until God’s order is observed—until believers can speak of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord (Phil. 3:8), as Paul could—it is vain to deal with the doctrine of ministry; it is “running before they are sent” to assume the position of ministers of Christ. We must, therefore, know the calling in order to walk worthy of it.

(5) There is another idea which I would suggest as preliminary to the development of ministry. I allude to the manner in which we should walk. It should be “with all lowliness, and meekness, and long-suffering”; qualifications these are, not the less needed by the ministers than by those ministered unto.

This exhortation comes to us with no small degree of force from “Paul the aged”—“the prisoner of the Lord.” It is said that from the same prison (at Rome) he penned the epistle to the Philippians and to Philemon, in which such exquisite exemplifications of the attributes here alluded to shine out. It is one thing to talk about these things, or to preach them; but do we live them? Placed in the trying circumstances for their test, do they manifest themselves?

Let it be our sincere desire, beloved, to aim high, though lower we may shoot. The knowledge of our high calling may excite spiritual pride in any believer; much more in one that ministers from such a height. What is the antidote? Lowliness. Does that mean that we are to take the low place? No; but to own that naturally we are in it. This supposes death as to the “old man” (Rom. 6), and a walking “in the Spirit” (Gal. 5).

The first Adam sought to attain to a higher place than God put him into; and he fell. Born of him, we are in ourselves low good-for-nothings, despite what the devil teaches us to the contrary; we are to walk “with all lowliness.”

“But how can I put up with the eccentricities of this brother and of that? Do what I may, he opposes me.” Well, you must seek divine grace, which will leave nothing of “me” to be grieved. Dead men don’t feel blows. It is your unbroken will—the opposite of meekness—that makes you feel the uncouth conduct of your brother. Thus Moses (remarkable usually for his meekness) lost his temper at Meribah. Let self be narrowly judged, and walk “with all meekness.”

I can bear with that for a day or two; but such persistent naughtiness on the part of those among whom I live, and to whom I minister, exhausts my patience.” Indeed? Are you sure you are not the naughty one? Nevertheless, you are to walk with all long-suffering. But again, you are not so much to expect from, as to give to, another. Each is to forbear (or yield to) another in love. The servant of the Lord, above all others, needs this exhortation. His fervent zeal for the glory of the Lord Jesus may begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh. Lowliness, practical humility, not thinking of self at all, are some results of the operation of the Holy Ghost in us; and will effectually displace proud self. If in personal, quiet communion with Christ, the soul feeds upon Himself, zeal will surely be tempered by lowliness. Mere doctrine, as to position and gift, away from Christ, will only inflate a naturally vain nature, and so render the most fervent zeal a fruitful source of dishonor to the name of Christ. Again; the very knowledge of personal responsibility to the Lord, and to no one else—as we hope to see by and by—may induce an over-bearing and naughtiness which would not only damage the spirit of the servant himself, but also render him repulsive to others, and this may creep on very insidiously; the spirit of meekness and gentleness is therefore to be cultivated. “The servant of God must not strive; but be gentle towards all.” In that way he will be “apt to teach,” being also “patient” (2 Tim. 2:24).

Further; the servant, in his place of responsibility, cannot tolerate what he believes to be evil, according to the word of God. He deals with it; and, in doing so, he is assailed by his brethren, and is evil spoken of. Then he needs—in addition to lowliness and meekness—long-suffering and forbearance in love.

All these divine traits (yes, divine, because they are such as are only produced by the Holy Ghost in us) were most perfectly exhibited in the Lord Jesus. Hence, to have Him always before us, as our pattern, is the sure way, and only true way, of success in walking worthy of our vocation.

Looking to the Lord for guidance, and for simplicity in the understanding of His truth, let us, for a while, seek to lay aside all our former notions of ministry; and let us endeavor to see “what saith the Lord” respecting it. In this way, perhaps, we shall the better be enabled to reject whatever we find the truth condemns, and to lay hold of what is of God.

I think it may be more easy for our minds to dispose of what we receive from the Scriptures on the subject before us, under a few propositions. I shall suggest the following plan:

1—What Is the Source of Ministry?

The answer to this is in Ephesians 4:11, “He gave.” Who is the He?—The person who ascended and took His seat at God’s right hand. And the Holy Ghost, before telling us that He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, turns aside to tell us who this person is—“He who ascended is the same also that descended into the lower parts of the earth, that he might fill all things.”

Before touching the question of ministry, our eyes are led to rest upon this person in some of the aspects of His divine, of His moral, glory. He must fill all things.

If anything among men is valued according to our estimate of the giver, may we not turn aside for a little while to see who “He” is from whom the “gifts unto men” proceed?

You must have observed, in reading the epistle to the Hebrews, how you are pleasingly detained at the very first page of the letter, with a sketch of the “Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.” The very God who had been speaking before by the prophets, now speaks through (that is, in or by) the Son; and lest you should despise the teaching, your mind must be impressed with the majesty of the Teacher; for He is the brightness of glory, the express image of God’s person, the upholder of all things by the word of His power.

So in Ephesians in connection with ministry. Lest any should make light of the gifts He imparts, or others should mimic so sacred a calling; or lest any one, or company of persons, should dare to meddle with a function which is His only, we are reminded of His superlative excellence, and of His transcendent glory.

God has determined that all things shall be put in subjection under His feet. Things in heaven, things in the earth, and things under the earth, must, by Jehovah’s decree, be subject to Him who came down and became a man in this world {Phil. 2}.

But, beloved friends, who are they that can come down? Persons can come down who were previously up. In other words, it were presumptuous in us to speak of going down, because as a matter of fact we are down already as men. The Lord Jesus, who was God from all eternity, co-equal and coeternal with the Father, He alone could come down, and this He did. You will get this statement in Ephesians 4:9-10, in which the various spheres of the glory of the Lord Jesus are alluded to—heavenly, filling all things above; down on the earth, filling all things below. Wherever He is, He fills all things, and under His feet all things are put in subjection. Less than this would not become a holy and righteous God, whose glory was the sole aim of the Son of Man.

Adam the first sought his good; in so doing he dishonored God. The second {last} Adam—the Lord from heaven—came not to do His own, but the will of Him that sent Him. Adam the first had therefore to be humbled; the Lord Jesus has been exalted; a name has been given Him above every name; to (or in virtue of) it every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue shall confess His Lordship to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:1-11).

After rising from the grave, the Lord, just before His ascension, declares, “All power is given to Me, in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). In Ephesians 1 He is spoken of as raised from the dead, and set far above all principalities, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and all things are put under His feet, and He is made Lord over all things. Again, in Colossians 1, He is referred to as “the first-born of every creature,” the head of the body, the church—among all He has the pre-eminence. He is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). Quoting the eighth Psalm, the Holy Ghost tells us (Heb. 2) that He is as a Man set over the works of God’s hands; and, lastly, all who have read the book of the Revelation must have paused to do homage to “the Son of Man” (Rev. 1:13), who is supreme all through the book, whether “the things that are, or the things that shall be after these” (v. 19) are considered.

In a word, then, the Lord Jesus, who, as a man, glorified God, has been entrusted with absolute authority over everything, and therefore over the church.² We do not yet see Him exercising His power in all these spheres; He bides His time, but He shall reign. Nevertheless such a position is His, accorded Him by God the Father, and shortly He will manifest it. Now He exercises His Lordship in the church, and supplies ministers for its edification, which all who own His Lordship will recognize.

Such is the person who gave “gifts unto men.” He, therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God. Indeed, I may say that the special care of God respects the honor of the One, who stooped so low to glorify God. God’s command is that “All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (John 5:23).

Now in the chapter I have just quoted, we find that the Father has given to the Son to have life in Himself, and to quicken (or to give life to) whom He will. What would you think of any human being, or of any organization, that arrogated such a right to give life—eternal life—to a sinner? You would simply pronounce the conduct blasphemous, inasmuch as to the Son of Man only—the Lord Jesus—has the right been given.

Do we read anywhere in the Scriptures of the church, or of any ecclesiastic, except the Apostles (Acts 8:19; 2 Tim. 1:6), having been entrusted with the imposition of gifts in the ministry? I am sure not. The only source is God; or, speaking more strictly, God through Christ. He who led captive the former captor of fallen men, received gifts for men, and He gives according to the measure of His grace. All who own Him as Saviour are His saints, whom He loves, and all are set by Him in the “one body,” and are indwelt by the “same Spirit,” and further, all such are to show forth His praises, are left here as His witnesses. But above and beyond all this, He imparts gifts according to His own will. He takes up some of His own, and qualifies them in a special way for service in the ministry of the word. All are alike the members of His body; but every member is not a “gift,” {a doma} a minister. On the contrary, He bestows gifts (or ministers, if you please), for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, etc. But the thought I wished to press was that the only proper channel of ministry is the Lord Jesus, the ascended Man—the One in whom manhood is joined to Deity.

I may say that there could not be Christian ministry without this exaltation of Christ. Ministry flows from Him, from that place of exaltation, it is a fruit of it. I do not say that the Lord did not send forth ministers before His exaltation to the right hand of God, for we know that twelve apostles and seventy disciples were by Him commissioned to go forth to preach, etc. But by a reference to the portions narrating it (Matt. 10; Luke 10), you will observe that the aspect is Jewish, and is a picture of what will be fully developed when He shall reign from the river to the ends of the earth—Israel established in blessing on the earth, and made the conveyers of it to others—when the church, of course, shall be with the Lord reigning over (not upon) the earth. In the charge to the twelve (Matt. 10), the Lord distinctly charged them not to go in the way of the Gentiles, but to Israel only; whereas, after He comes from the dead, He removes the barrier to their ministry, and sends them to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28); Christian (not Jewish) ministry then commenced. In the passage before us, it is said (and “it is written,” should be sufficient for faith), that He ascended and received gifts for men. Hence, I repeat, that ministry flows from Christ as the exalted Head in heaven.

In 1 Corinthians 12 it may appear, at a superficial glance, that the Holy Ghost was referred to as the source of ministry; and specially would this conclusion be drawn, if Hebrews 2:4—“gifts of the Spirit”—be taken in connection. Well, if this were so, it would still teach that God, the Holy Ghost, imparted gifts, thus, at any rate, excluding pretentious man, whether in a king, a prelate, or a Presbytery, from so sacred a function. But, as another remarks, by a careful investigation of the subject, it will be very evident that the Lord Jesus is the source of ministry. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Ghost is looked at as the alone distributor, not the giver of the gifts. So in Hebrews 2 (see margin) “God (is) bearing witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Ghost.”

The Holy Ghost always guards the glory of the Lord Jesus, who once humbled Himself in this world. “He shall glorify Me,” said the Lord; and so He does. Hence He tells us that there are differences of ministries, but they are from one source—“the same LORD.” So there are diversities of gifts seen in operation; but one Spirit so directs them—the Holy Ghost, actually on the earth, so works in them that there should be no schism in the body. Such is the normal view of things; such they were when Paul wrote. Alas! for what we see now.

The Lord Jesus, then, fits, qualifies, and sends forth the ministers; their source is divine, their mission divine, strength for it divine, their object divine, but all have to do with Christ.

This is the place, I think, to answer a question—Should not persons be “trained for the ministry”? Certainly, but by whom? Certainly not by the church; for, as we shall see presently, the church is to be edified by the ministers—“for the perfecting of the saints ... for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

The Lord, and not man, fits His chosen vessel, and in His own time He puts the grace (or gift) in him and sends him forth. Hence Paul says, “When it pleased GOD, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Gal. 1:15-16).

Here it is evident that this great apostle was not only not trained by men, but positively avoided men. GOD had separated him, and called him to preach. This was enough; his qualification was complete; he did not even go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him. Indeed, we know from the Acts of the Apostles that he preached in Damascus three years (Acts 9:22, with Gal. 1:18) before he went to Jerusalem. Whom the Lord fits is fully qualified, and hence the church sins in attempting to add to what He does, and in refusing to own what, being from the Lord, must be perfect.

The training, or rather the fitness, is shown us in 2 Corinthians 4:1-13:

(a) Moral fitness—“We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestations of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (v. 2).

(b) Divine intelligence—“God ... hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6).

(c) Divine strength—“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of GOD” (v. 7).

(d) Secret of success—“Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” So then death worketh in us (that is, the practical walking through this scene as men dead to it), and life in you (ministers in whom “the flesh” is not allowed to rule, are those who are most used for the developing of spiritual life in those to whom they minister) (vvs. 10-12).

(e) Such do not trade in unfelt truth—“We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak” (v. 13).

And just for a moment look at Revelation 1. John in that book ministers Christ as the Judge—now judging in the midst of the assemblies, and as the One soon to judge Israel, the Gentiles, etc. Hence the judicial robes of Christ in this chapter—His all-searching eye of fire—His unbending, unyielding feet of brass, and His thundering, majestic voice! The sight of this puts John at His feet as dead (v. 17). Yes, John, who could lean on His bosom in the days of His flesh (John 13) falls at His feet as dead. Such, beloved, is the condition of soul that the Lord can use—“a broken vessel.” True His love cheers His servant with “Fear not;” but I do ask, is a soul “trained for the ministry” that can be unbroken in the presence of the Lord’s august majesty?

Have you not further observed that John is a worshipper (Rev. 1:5-6) before he ministers (v. 7)? So it is. And this leads me also to remind you that the truth about the Lord’s Supper is given (1 Cor. 11) before that about ministry (1 Cor. 12 and 14). The fact is, that the believer cannot properly appreciate ministry who does not recognize the Lordship of Jesus in the showing of His death, once a week, according to His will. If it were otherwise, 1 Cor. 12 would be 11, and 11 would be 12. You see there is no reason why saints may not break bread every Lord’s Day, if their walk be godly; all may then be worshippers; but although gifts are on the earth for all the church, yet it may please the Lord to withhold them for a time from any one place. Is it necessary to add that in Paul’s dealing with the Corinthians for their ungodly way of eating the Lord’s Supper, he says not a word to any minister? I am not aware that even elders are ever mentioned as being in that gathering. The loaf at the table may be broken by one, who, on behalf of the assembly, gives thanks, and so the cup is passed, after the giving of thanks, also; but this needs not a “gift”—it may be done by any brother at the table, it is not ministry.

Suffer me, beloved, to enforce this on you, and so examine yourselves, whether you are gathered to ministry or to CHRIST. Suppose that you had no ministry for weeks, months, or years, could you still go on with the Holy Ghost in a quiet witnessing for Christ in these last days? O, may all of us learn more and more of the value of His sufficiency! Then, in the absence of gifts, we can lean more fully on Him whose Spirit will guide us into all truth; and such as are gifts will exercise themselves in the spirit of self-renunciation that Christ may be magnified in us.

In many associations of Christians it is our privilege to know some who show unmistakable signs of divine fitness for ministering. God uses them in His sovereign grace; souls are blessed by their ministry; and the Lord will reward them in His grace according as they serve Him in what they do. Nevertheless, they have erred in having failed to see the LORD alone in their preparation, ordination, and service.

It suffices to know, and to own practically, that the Lord is sovereign in ministry; and any attempt to interfere with His rights in training, calling, or appointing, is gross usurpation. We will revert to this again.

2—The Direction and the Object of Ministry

Like the truth about the church, most of us for many centuries regarded that respected ministry as hidden behind such veils of mystery as none dared to pry into except a privileged few; and, profiting by such superstition, “the laity” were never indoctrinated into the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject, if even “the clergy” were capable of telling out the mind of God in the matter.

There is nothing, however, which has been revealed in the word of God that is placed beyond the ken of the simplest child of faith! I deny that certain truths are for the learned only. All who are spiritual should discern spiritual things; for the normal attainment of those indwelt by the Holy Ghost is that they “know all things”³ (1 John 2:20).

Now, He has not left us to grope in the dark about ministry; He speaks out plainly; and it is due to His honor that we search for what He has revealed. We have already seen that Christian ministry is a fruit of the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God, like the formation of the

church and the descent of the Holy Ghost. Now, God had instructed His people Israel by the prophets (I mean here Old Testament prophets); as we may see by comparing such Scriptures as Heb. 1, Ex. 24:7, Josh. 8:34, Neh. 8:3, Jer. 25:4, etc.; and that parents were charged with teaching their children is also deducible (Deut. 4:10). Is there any agreement between that principle and Christian ministry?

(1) In their origin, both were from God to man;

(2) man had no share in its arrangements then; man should not meddle with it now.

Wherein do they differ?

(1) Ministry, in prophets, was to Israel only; the Christian ministry goes out to "all the world." God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5).

(2) We are told by Paul (2 Cor. 3:10), that, in contrast with the gospel, it {the law} was a ministration of death; inasmuch as Israel only obtained life by keeping the law, which was found to be impossible; the gospel ministry ministers righteousness, not as that which God exacts, but which He gives to faith (Rom. 1, 3).

(3) God was pleased to raise up prophets, from time to time, to send to Israel; but the ministry was not constant: the Christian ministry is constant, because the Holy Ghost, on the earth with the saints, has charge of it; and He will remain with the Assembly till it is removed from the earth. So we see, that although ministry to Israel had certain things in common with Christian ministry, yet the contrast is so great, that we must not go to the Old Testament for our information respecting Christian ministry.

PRIESTHOOD differs from MINISTRY. There is another very popular notion, that ministry is the same thing as priesthood. And so far is this indulged, that in the Establishment {Church of England}, as in Popery {Romanism}, there is a distinct and exclusive party of men known as priests; and so much are they acknowledged that they are asked to approach God on behalf of others, as though none had the privilege but themselves. It would be well, therefore, for us to see at once the difference between ministry and priesthood; for the two things are as separable and separate as going and coming. Under the law, none could approach God but a caste of men whom He appointed as priests. These offered sacrifices for the people who were not themselves permitted to draw near to God; the veil was a barrier between God and them. (Read Heb. 9 with Lev. 2, 4.) Their relationship with Him could be sustained only by the priesthood, which was vested in the family of Aaron. But such priests approached God for man; the direction of priesthood is to God. Over the priests the High Priest was set, and he only could go into the "holiest" once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

Our great High Priest is the Lord Jesus; and He has entered into the very presence of God, because of His blood shedding, which has perfected forever them that are sanctified; and His presence before God gives us boldness to draw near with purged consciences into the presence of God also, in the light where He is. And to every one of you, my beloved brethren, who own Him as your Saviour, is this grace given (Heb. 10).

Yes; redemption has been accomplished, the veil has been rent from heaven to earth, and access to God is granted now to the feeblest believer; not one spot remains to disturb the conscience. Hence, by the Holy Ghost given, every one whose faith is in God, can now draw near within the holiest of all, and see God in the face of Jesus Christ—can gaze upon Him and adore Him without the least thing to hinder. O what boundless grace! Could we not now sing together

Let no man rob you of your privilege; every one of you is a priest unto God. In 1 Peter 2 we read of a spiritual house, and a holy priesthood, composed of "lively stones," who have come to Christ "the living stone"; and their office is to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Will any dare to argue you into the belief that this privilege is not one common to all believers? And when such a priesthood is assembled for worship (homage and adoration paid to God, inciting praise, etc.), it may please the Holy Ghost to use any one present to address God on behalf of the assembly; or to lead its praises in a hymn. Such praise, or prayer, will be the expression of all the spiritual, of the whole assembly if it be spiritual; but this, I repeat, is toward God whereas if a gifted person, a minister, addresses the saints, he utters the mind of God to them; and such utterance may tend to elevate the spiritual condition of saints; it may be much above their actual state; but such is toward man. Again, I say, any of the priesthood except women, may express to God the praises of the assembly; but only such may teach or exhort, in whom the grace to minister has been deposited by Christ. So that it is possible for an assembly in one place, to worship God most happily; and yet to have no gift, no minister, in its midst. Do let me beseech you to ponder these differences between priesthood and ministry.

The Lord has been pleased to make known to you something of the value of Himself as your Saviour; and while it is your highest privilege to go forth to Himself, and to have fellowship with such as desire to worship in spirit and in truth, it would be very despicable to go out to ministry; in this you may soon be disappointed; but to fail in the other, the High Priest, that is Christ, and the "place of worship," even "heaven itself" {Heb. 10:19}, must be displaced; and you know that such is impossible. The priesthood then, according to the Scriptures, is composed of saints, believers in Christ, who are such because they are Christians. Each of you is a priest, but all of you are not ministers.

Again, it is the privilege of all saints, as priests with God, to make intercession for all men; for kings and for those in authority, etc. (1 Tim. 1). But all believers may do this, and all will, who are free to get God's thoughts; that is, who are walking in the Spirit, and have not so frequently to halt to be occupied with their own failings and shortcomings. I say that in order for us to be at liberty to pray for others we must ourselves be in communion with God; and proper as it is to be examining ourselves, or confessing our failings to God, yet they are not communion, but rather the evidence of loss of communion. But interceding for others is not ministry; it is the act of a priest; it is the approach to God for man. But is this to be left to an exclusive ministry only, and to be done merely at certain fixed times?

The Scriptures do not say so. If we were all more simple and child-like before our Father, we would frequently go to Him on behalf of others; and there our own souls would be blessed, because none can be in His presence without being blessed.

If these ideas be according to the truth, what about the “gift of prayer”? Will you tell me, if a son requires the gift of begging in order to fit him to speak to his father about something on his mind? Certainly not. And does not God read my thoughts, and know what I need before I ask Him? Further, is it not the Holy Ghost who puts it in us to desire what He knows God will hear (Rom. 8)? The word of God does allude to several gifts {charismata in 1 Cor. 12}; but that of prayer is not one, thank God; if it were so, we would need human priests to go to God for us. But we have already seen that all of us have access to Himself through Christ. The direction of priesthood, therefore, is God-ward; priests go from man to God.

Let us now, with our way thus far cleared, search for the direction and the object of ministry.

To testify of Christ, as the exalted One, has been the great mission of the Holy Ghost to this earth. His presence here is a witness that the Person whom God sent into the world, but whom men cast out, has been seated in glory, all things being put in subjection to Him. Hence Peter announces at Jerusalem, “Therefore” (because of the exaltation of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Ghost) “let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). By this announcement 43000 souls received the word, owned Him, were baptized unto His name, and broke bread in remembrance of Him.

In the next chapter the same truth is enunciated (ver. 13). The people wondered at seeing a lame man leaping, whom Peter, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, had healed. Peter tells them that they should not marvel, for the cure was one of the many ways which God took for manifesting that He had “glorified His Son Jesus, whom the Jews had denied in the presence of Pilate.”

Accordingly, the same hatred of man which led to the crucifixion of Christ is stirred up by Satan; and in the next chapter we find a triumvirate of assailants attacking the men that preached Jesus. “The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead”: and for such a grave offence “they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day.” But God had put His seal upon their ministry; and “many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”

In this most interesting chapter of the Acts of the Apostles (or we should say of the Holy Ghost, for it was really He who acted through the ministers, and acts through them still, whom the LORD appoints)—in this portion, I say, the ministry was from God to man, and its object was God’s glory in Christ. This Satan knew very well; and therefore he stirred up such dire opposition to what was done. (You must bear in mind that the Scriptures always present a trinity of opposition to God: the world is in opposition to the Father; Satan to Christ, and the flesh to the Spirit.) Without controversy it may be said that if Peter had preached anything but Christ and His glory, he would have been applauded as “great” and “learned”: but Satan hates his Captor {Christ} too much not to come out in ambush occasionally to give battle. The servants of the Lord were not ignorant of his devices: they traced effects to the proper cause; and, crying to God, they owned that it was not against them, but against God’s Christ (vv. 24-27, with Psa. 11) that the opposition was raised.

By seven signs, which the Holy Ghost records, God again set His seal to a ministry which had the glory of Christ for its object:

- (1) the place was shaken where they were assembled;
- (2) they were all filled with the Holy Ghost;
- (3) they became bold in speaking the word;
- (4) fellowship in heart and soul was enjoyed by the multitude that believed, leading even to caring for each other’s temporal needs;
- (5) the apostles, with great power, gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus;
- (6) great grace was upon them all; and
- (7) hearts being enlarged, purses were opened, and means were laid at the disposal of the Lord’s servants.

In Acts 5 a man and his wife who could act as hypocrites in the presence of such manifested grace are visited instantaneously with judgment. In the meanwhile, believers, in multitudes both of men and women, were the more added to the LORD. Another persecution breaks out, and the servants are cast into the common prison. The Lord by an angel lets them out, and forthwith they are found preaching again.

Summoned before the council, they are examined for speaking about Christ. If they had merely read the law, or delivered a thesis on some religious notion (so fashionable now-a-days!), they would doubtless have had the patronage of the great among the people; but the name of Jesus, the glory of Christ, was more than could be borne; hence the apostles who served Him faithfully were beaten, and commanded not to “speak in the name of Jesus.”

So far the direction of the ministry was to Israel—its object the glory of Christ. In Acts 8, the circle of ministry enlarges; its diameter extends to Samaria. Philip preached in that city the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ; many believed and were baptized, both men and women, unto (εἰς) the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 12). The Ethiopian eunuch is met in the desert; to him Philip preaches Jesus (v. 35), to whose Name he baptized him.

But, besides Philip, other servants of Christ “that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”; and, inasmuch as it bore witness to Christ, in whom is life, it was used by God in ministering peace to all who believed—first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. But let it be remembered that the source was heavenly. Fit vessels, as we have seen in those at Jerusalem and at Samaria, were sent forth to preach of His exaltation and glory, and of salvation through Him.

But lest this should be forgotten, what do we find in Acts 9? That the Lord speaks directly and immediately from heaven; and Saul of Tarsus, afterwards Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ (that is, one sent by Jesus Christ), is converted. Here the Lord accomplishes His object without the channel of any of the apostles or evangelists; He acts directly from His place in glory on one who, in persecuting the disciples, was

persecuting Him. Now, the conversion of Saul, in this way, is full of interest in connection with our subject. The enmity of the Jews showed itself in a remarkable way in their persecution of such as owned the name of Jesus; but Saul outrivaled them all: for, by his own account of himself, he "was exceedingly mad" against confessors of Christ. Nevertheless, such was the character of the ministry that by it this mighty opposer of the truth is at once arrested at the very zenith of his bitterness, and is heard to say "LORD" to Jesus. It is true that Ananias was sent to him to confirm his faith, but in this unique case we see most distinctly where ministry starts from, and what it has to accomplish; its direction is from the Lord to man, and its object is His glory. Unless these lessons are received into our minds from the Lord, through His word, ministry will be associated, in our minds, with very different ideas; its direction will be only to a corporation or an association—a church; and its object, making proselytes to such, or providing a "living" for an individual in one of "the learned professions!" Even the conversion of souls may be so uppermost in the mind as to obscure the great object of Christian ministry—namely, the glory of the Lord Jesus; whereas, if the latter were prominently sought by us, evangelists would be used in conversions, teachers in instructing the converts, etc., or we would know sometimes the joy of "standing still," and just seeing God's salvation wrought, as in Saul's case, without us. Do we not know of persons brought to Christ without any human instrumentality whatever—by just reading the Word of God which the Holy Ghost applied to their hearts and consciences? Indeed we do know some; and thousands more will meet us in glory to praise Him, of whose very existence, as well as their conversion, no believer had any knowledge upon earth.

But is the opposite not mourned over? Are there not many who, regardless of what is due to the Lord, say, Peace, peace, when there is no peace?

We see, further, in Saul's case, that the LORD had made him a chosen vessel to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

(1) The choice was the LORD's; and this must be so with every true minister of God;

(2) The chosen vessel was to preach Christ, to tell of His glory, to declare His name;

(3) The direction of his mission should be to the Gentiles, to Kings, and to the children of Israel. In Acts 2, the circle was restricted to Jerusalem; in Acts 8 we noticed that it extended to Samaria; and now we find it become world-wide.

As was pointed out by another, the very first mention of Paul's preaching contains the nucleus of what he afterwards fully declared. He was the first to preach that the crucified One was the Son of God—"straightway (or immediately), he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (v. 20). Peter had declared that He was "Lord and Christ." Now, Paul announces His personal glory as the "Son of God"—a truth which is calculated to give very high tone to the ministry of any servant of Christ. Preachers of the law, as that by which man may get peace, or may please God, are ignorant of the gospel of the glory of Christ, which Paul preached; and souls who never learn the latter, know nothing of deliverance in their souls, although they may have life.

It would be, perhaps, foreign to our object, to search into the meaning of Paul's expression, "my gospel" (2 Tim. 2:8). But, let us bear in mind that, although the testimony to Christ, borne by Peter and others before Paul, forms part of the ministry which respects the glory of Christ, yet the special revelation made to Paul respecting the mystery—Christ and the church—is that which gives peculiar character to the Christian ministry which we are investigating. None who reads Colossians 1:23-26 can doubt this statement.

Before quitting Acts 9, let us observe another example of the object of ministry; or rather, a way in which the object is met. The Lord told Ananias, that Paul was to suffer many things for His name's sake. "Suffer?" one asks; "I thought the ministry was a very respectable position, which immuned persons from suffering; a situation which rather gave opportunity for ruling—at any rate, for taking things very easily."

Indeed! Let us go back to Acts 7:59—"And they stoned Stephen." Go on to Acts 12, and read of Herod killing James, and proceeding to take Peter also (because he saw it pleased the Jews), cast him into prison. See the Jews (in Acts 13), stirring up devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raising a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, expelled them from their coasts. In Acts 14:19 we see Paul stoned, and dragged out of Lystra as dead. Will you search all through the Scriptures, and show me one example of a faithful witness for Christ finding his path an easy one? The idea may prompt some, now-a-days, to intrude themselves into a place, into which the Lord never called them; but Paul, at the very outset, was to suffer many things for the name of Christ. Accordingly we find him and Silas, with their feet fast in the stocks, sitting in the jail at Philippi (Acts 16), singing praises to God, and used to loose stronger fetters with which Satan had bound their keeper.

Beloved brethren, I am fully persuaded that every true and faithful minister of Jesus Christ (I do not say of churches, but of the LORD—such as He calls, and such as serve Him, and not man) will, like all who live godly in Christ Jesus, suffer persecution. True, a blind fanaticism may impel such lawlessness as evokes the punishment of criminal law. I do not speak of this: I mean that faithfulness to the Lord on the part of a truly godly spiritual servant of God will now, as ever, expose him who practices it to the scorn, and derision, and persecution too, in some shape, of those who, being carnal, are enemies of God. I say more, that a worldly religion will take the lead in such opposition. Who "killed the Prince of life"? Did not the religious Jews? By whom was Stephen stoned? Was not Saul of Tarsus, the "Pharisee," an abettor to the crime? I do not wish to leave the Scripture history, or I would ask who lighted the fires of Smithfield, and who persecuted the Puritans? I may add that he will know nothing of suffering for the name of CHRIST who becomes the minister of a religion which the world patronizes; but all who serve the Lord after the fashion of Paul (Gal. 1:10) must wait patiently for His approval. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

We see, then, that to suffer for Christ is an element of the Christian ministry: to glorify Christ, "whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20), was Paul's only aim; and such was his utterance in his prison at Rome.⁵

It is remarkable that many in these days aim at being popular preachers, and, with most pious motives, at conversion of souls; and not a little effort is made in "revival meetings" to extort a confession from many. Surely every feeder upon the "fatted calf" should have a heart to make merry with the father when returning prodigals receive His welcome. But I would seek to press the inquiry upon myself, on every minister of the gospel now listening to me, and on every saint—What is the motive? Is it that Christ be magnified? or is it not that you may be well

spoken of as being used in conversions?

Let us learn a lesson from Stephen. He began his ministry "full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 7:65); his address is recorded, but not one word is said as to the result of any but himself, whom wicked hands sent to heaven. I say that not a conversion is referred to. Yet persons talk so much about conversions, as if they formed the highest object of ministry. What! was Stephen's ministry without an object? Well, let whomever will merely aim at men's approval: may we learn to have our eye fixed on CHRIST, for His divine approbation.

It suffices to learn that the Lord's notice of His faithful servant is specially chronicled. He, whom Paul assures us took His seat after having purged our sins (Heb. 1:3), showed Himself, through the opened heavens, to His faithful martyr, as the One whom the very religious world had killed, but who was then standing (or placed) at God's right hand!

The great object of ministry, therefore, is to magnify CHRIST; and this God accomplishes through His servants, whether by their preaching or by their suffering, or by both. Of course souls are brought to God by it, and saints are edified through it.

3—The Immediate Director of Ministry Is the Holy Ghost

Arriving at Acts 13, we find the Holy Ghost particularly mentioned as selecting "whom He will" for special work. It is well to remember that His action is recorded in this book, in which we get an insight into His operations as long as the church is on the earth; and that is questionable wisdom which does not own His presence and directorship now as in apostolic times.

Saints forget this—if ever they knew it—who sanction men, when the Holy Ghost should be free both to call and appoint to the ministry.

Let us see how He acted in the case before us. At Antioch there was an assembly of saints. All, however, were not ministers; for it is distinctly said "there were in the church (or assembly) certain prophets and teachers."

Two extremes of error are to be avoided in this day of confusion:

- (1) it is not true that there should be only a minister to an assembly of Christians;
- (2) it is equally false that all saints in an assembly are necessarily ministers.

There are four specified as being in the gathering at Antioch: this excludes the idea, at once, of a one man ministry; again, if all present were gifted men, the Holy Ghost would not have said "there were in the assembly prophets and teachers." Indeed, I say without hesitation, that the word of God sanctions no such notion as being the minister of a church. We will see this more transparently as we proceed.

From among the prophets and teachers at Antioch, then, the Holy Ghost directed the separation of Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto He had called them.

Now, "the work" was a special tour for preaching the word in the western regions; and the laying on of hands was a sign of fellowship and blessing expressed by the assembly (or by their fellow-laborers merely) at Antioch.

I do not apprehend any difficulty to simple souls, who have traced the action of the Holy Ghost in Ministry so far. It is as monstrous to conceive of two directorships, at the same time, as to think of two heads ordering one body. It was not the assembly of saints, nor a college of officials, that called and sent forth these men on their mission; the Holy Ghost selected them (v. 2); and the Holy Ghost sent them forth (v. 4).

The laying on of hands was not for ordination; they had been already ordained by the Holy Ghost {they were already preaching}, and saints were then more subject to Him than to impeach His sufficiency or try to supplement what He had completed. I say nothing of the folly of supposing an inferior order of ministers—"prophets and teachers"—ordaining such as God had set first in the church, namely, apostles.6

The act of the imposition of hands seems to have been practiced from very early times, as we see, right through the Scriptures. Thus, "Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it upon Ephraim's head ... and he blessed them" (Gen. 48:14-20). Again, the Lord took children into His arms, His hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16).

Further, hands were imposed as an external sign of countenance, approval, or fellowship, as is our manner of greeting each other in this country. And, lastly, hands were imposed as an expression of conveyance, as in Leviticus, where we read of the offerer transferring or conveying, ceremonially, his sins to the head of the sacrificed lamb; and also in 1 Timothy 1:6, and Acts 8, etc., where we read of the Holy Ghost being communicated mediately to the Samaritan converts by the laying on of hands. I should remark here that Timothy, who was specially indicated before by prophecy, received his gift for ministry mediately by the laying on of Paul's hands. At the same time, however, the Presbytery (the elders) associated or had fellowship with Paul. In 2 Timothy 1:6, διὰ, through, or by means of, is the particle used; whereas, in 1 Timothy 4:14, μετὰ, which implies community or participation, is the word employed. I do not remember another similar instance, in which the Lord employed one of His servants as the honored channel through whom He conveyed a gift; and, of course, it were absurd of any not thus specially commissioned to pretend to the position. The Queen may charge one of her ministers to confer a title in her name, and the act would be valid; but without such royal commission the ceremony would be just child's play.

So, now that we have neither prophecy to indicate, nor apostolic authority to convey a gift, the act of imposing hands with that object would be mockery. Therefore, to impose hands today on any one, and by any one, with a view to the conferring of a gift as for ministry, is sinful mimicry of apostolic power.

I conclude that the assembly at Antioch expressed their participation in the work of the apostles Barnabas and Saul by laying their hands upon them. It was not ordination. Similarly, I presume that saints might now meet together and commend in prayer to the Lord beloved brethren going forth to service and why may they not also lay their hands upon them on such occasions? Their doing so would of course

impart nothing to them, neither would the omission entail any loss. Yet I suppose that if they were simple, and in full fellowship with what the Holy Ghost was doing, they would unceremoniously express the same, and they would be gainers.

I suggest these thoughts to you, not to arraign any of my dear brethren before your bar for your judgment on them; God is my witness. But I deem it needful to call your attention to Scripture on these points, which have been so distorted in Christendom, lest you should refuse to own those whom the Lord has gifted, and whom the Holy Ghost uses.

I say, therefore, that the SERVANT OF GOD NEEDS NO DIRECTORSHIP BUT THAT OF THE HOLY GHOST; and THE INTERFERENCE OF MAN IS AS SINFUL AS THE SUBMISSION TO IT IS DISHONORING TO GOD. 7

4—Ministry in Its Relationship to the Assembly of God and to the World

This proposition might have been considered in connection with our first, but I thought it deserving a separate place, inasmuch as great confusion exists in the minds of men about the church and the world, and, consequently, the ministers suited to each. We saw that the Assembly of God was composed of believers in Christ, indwelt, individually and corporately, by the Holy Ghost. Outside it were Jews and Gentiles; but as the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles has been removed, let us speak now of those outside the church as forming the world. The Apostle Paul designates the position of those with the Holy Ghost “within”; and he uses the term “without” for those not in the assembly (1 Cor. 5:12).

I would therefore say that a caste of ministry is specially fitted for service “without,” and others labor “within.” Now, all of them are set in the church—“first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28).

Looking at the Scripture we read (Eph. 4) we find a list differing a little from this, “He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.”

The fact is that a formal category of gifts is found nowhere; the Holy Ghost, in His grace, supplies in each case, that which suits the particular subject He is elucidating. In 1 Corinthians, therefore, we find not only a list, but care is also taken to give the order of the gifts, and what the Corinthians prized most highly, “gifts of tongues,” are given last. What poor, foolish beings we are! Like children, we are so fond of playthings to the neglect of that by which we should profit for God’s glory. Tongues were for a sign to the world—those “without”—at the commencement of the church’s existence; these the poor Corinthians desired; they did not earnestly covet the best gifts {1 Cor. 12:31}; least of all did they rise to what God is in His nature as the One in whom alone true joy was to be found. They rejoiced in the manifestation of His power, but they did not joy in God Himself (Rom. 5:11).

I may here remark that the gifts are to last as long as there is the “body” upon the earth; hence Ephesians 4, “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” At any rate those given in this portion shall remain.

Respecting the APOSTLES and the PROPHETS we have them in their writings not in persons—they have had no successors.

We are told (Eph. 2:20) that the apostles and prophets are the foundation of the holy temple built by the Lord.

Viewed as a building, indwelt by the Holy Ghost, its corner stone is Christ indeed. Paul speaking of the same thing (1 Cor. 3), as “God’s building,” in which Paul is a responsible builder, speaks of Christ as the foundation.

You will observe that the apostles and prophets, Paul in particular, had authority for laying the basis of the building; in other words, through what they wrote and spoke, we learn what the building is. If Paul, “a wise master-builder,” builds, he puts in that material which corresponds with the foundation; he puts in no wood, hay, stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones; and he says to us who follow him, “Take care what you build.” I now finish speaking of 1 Corinthians 3. Again, the Holy Ghost in Ephesians 2 Sanctions the principles laid down by the apostles and prophets, and by a figure of speech speaks of them instead of their teachings, as the broad but limited basis of the “holy temple.”

This should be pondered in a day like this, when some would impeach the completeness of the scriptures by introducing “new ideas” apart from the word.

Now, when these two passages are considered, it must be evident that there could be no apostles and prophets after the close of the sacred canon, except some would start another building, which indeed would be “another,” or we should have to think of more than one foundation to a building.

It would appear, then, that the apostles were the authoritative agents used by the Holy Ghost, not only for teaching, but for governing the assembly; and their teaching and conduct are given us in the New Testament, while the prophets were the mediate communicators of the mind of God to the assembly, at a time when the epistles, as we now have them, were not together. The apostles, in that sense, were prophets, but the prophets were not apostles. The assembly could appoint neither, but on the contrary was to be subject to, and was to profit by them.

The assembly in its relationship to the prophets is seen in 1 Corinthians 14. That portion, by the by, is not so much given us for showing how the gifts acted as that we might learn how the HOLY GHOST directed such as were present. This principle is all-important, because although we might not have the same number of gifts today, yet we have the same Spirit to direct such as remain to the church.

Is it necessary to remind you that the “prophets” of Ephesians 4 are post-Pentecostal gifts? To those that doubt the statement I remark

(1) That the order in which they are mentioned here, as in 1 Corinthians 12, should be sufficient to show that they are prophets of a new order of things, gifts “set in the assembly,” which, of course, did not exist before Pentecost; they are placed second to the “apostles,” and I

have never heard any one who asserted that the apostolate ever existed before the Lord Jesus created it.

(2) The Apostle Paul tells us that “the mystery, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men ... as now revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:2-5). He speaks of preceding dispensations as being in “other ages”; while what is peculiar to this—namely, the dispensation of the church—is “Now revealed”; and such revelation is made unto such as God has “set in the church”—to apostles and prophets, whom we have still in their writings.

The apostles and prophets, therefore, were gifts of the Lord for the church; they accomplished their ministry in the deposition, of truths respecting “Christ and the church,” and they have passed off leaving no successors.⁸

Every class of gift now existing should profit by the example of the apostles, in whom, in some measure, all the gifts were deposited; while all saints need to profit by their TEACHING, sanctioned as it is by the Holy Ghost as forming part of the “Holy Scriptures.”

Evangelists are next referred to. They are the ministers of the gospel preached to every creature under heaven, while the teacher is a minister of the church to fulfill the word of God (Col. 1:23-25). Is the thought of rank, as men say, suggested in this order? Beloved brethren, how can persons indulge such carnal thoughts, who, being once dead in trespasses and sins, have by sovereign grace, been delivered from wrath? Would that be walking worthy of our calling, with all lowliness and meekness? Surely not. The fact is that, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the order is not a prominent design at all, as in 1 Corinthians, where there was carnality; and I should think that it was time to profit by the admonition given (John. 12:1-3; 1 John 4:1) respecting the spirits in men, when I found any one professing to be a servant of God contending for position, or for his “rank in the ministry.”

The evangelist seems pre-eminently to be one whose ministry lies chiefly without in the world. We saw before that the church of God was viewed as a building composed of “lively stones.” To use the figure, then, I would say that the evangelist’s work is to dig in the quarry for the stone, which he turns over to the teacher for polishing and arranging in its proper place; while the pastor sees that no efforts of tempests outside, nor the schemes of the many enemies—Satan being the chief—who hate its founder, should in anywise toss it about.

But no one can be an evangelist to whom the Lord has not committed the gift. As Sovereign, He may bless the word read even by a Mormonite, which would not, therefore, stamp the reader as an evangelist. I repeat that the Lord trains the man, from the child, for his work; reveals the knowledge of Himself to the individual; puts the grace into him; and, providing an open door for his ministry, the Holy Ghost sends him forth, and uses him for bringing souls to God.

In connection with what we saw of Philip (Acts 8) who was an evangelist (Acts 21:8), I would suggest a few thoughts respecting this gift of Christ, and then proceed to the teachers.

(a) The Holy Ghost, and not the assembly, nor any other individual, directs the movements of the evangelist (v. 39).

(b) His is not an office, as we shall soon see, which necessarily supposes residence in the place with the assembly; the evangelist is a gift who may (indeed he should) reside in a place for some time and evangelize it, and may also start from it to evangelize other places, as did Philip; but his gift supposes traveling, for which he in every way is fitted by the Lord.

(c) It is not said that Philip received salary for preaching, nor any pay whatever; indeed, he could not expect it from the church, for he was not its servant but the Lord’s, who supplies His servants bountifully. Paul—than whom, I suppose, none worked harder for the Lord—worked with his own hands (Acts 20:33-35) as a tent-maker; Luke as a Physician; and even our blessed Lord, to set an example, was not ashamed to be a carpenter (Mark 6:3). So much for the positive evidence against a paid-ministry. For negative testimony, I may say that I do not find one example in all the New Testament to support the practice. We must, however, bear in mind that it is the privilege of saints who are competent to help forward anything that is for the glory of the Lord, and to encourage those—whether evangelists, pastors, or teachers—whom He permits to labor in His word. The principle is plain enough in the word—“They that preach the gospel should live of the gospel”; thus the Apostle Paul assured the Corinthians.⁹ But he never used that power: he would be free from all men; and as to the Corinthians, they were too carnal to be permitted to have fellowship with so holy a work. However, when he was in need, the offering of the Philippians was “an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God”; and he regarded it less as that which he desired, than as that which was “fruit abounding to their account” (Phil. 4:14-19).

There are other examples of fellowship in the gospel expressed by lodging and boarding God’s servants, who took nothing of the Gentiles (3 John 6-8; Rom. 16, etc.).

So today the evangelist, directed by the Holy Ghost, goes¹⁰ uninvited to a place where perhaps he knows no one, and announces the gospel. Some saint of God—a Gaius (Rom. 16:23)—recognizing the gift of God in him, or possibly one of the converts, like Lydia (Acts 16), offers the hospitality of his, or her, house. Another saint of God offers the use of his house, or defrays the expenses of a room to preach in; while another or the same busies himself in inviting people to the preaching. In all these ways he is helped and encouraged, while those who have fellowship with him, “after a godly sort,” have fruit which abounds to their account.

More than this; if the servant of the Lord be so wholly engaged in His service as not to have time to support himself it is the will of the Lord that saints who know him should, in all simplicity, see to it that he has his needs supplied. It may now be asked, “What then is the difference, as to support between such as you have described and a paid evangelist?” This—the one is entirely dependent upon God, and exercises faith in Him for all he needs, the other cannot exercise faith, for he knows and sees the source of his supply in man. I would ask—Does the Lord send forth His servant and neglect to provide for his maintenance? Why He could even use ravens to feed one once (1 Kings 17:4, 6).

The evangelist, then, is such a gift as the Lord fits, calls, and sends forth, and whom the Holy Ghost directs and uses in the bringing of souls to CHRIST; the world is his field, to the unsaved is chiefly his mission; he is, himself in Christ, and starting from Him, he rests not till souls are with Him in Christ. In other words, the work of the evangelist is not complete even when a person finds peace in believing; he must be “perfect in Christ Jesus.” Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to do more than to save from hell—it was to bring us to God

(1 Peter 3:18); and to drop the convert short of this is bad workmanship: the stone is not only to be quarried out, but to be brought up and set in its true place in the “holy temple.” And the evangelist labors with this end in view.

The “PASTORS and TEACHERS” differ from the evangelist in being more used to those “within.” The heart of the evangelist addresses itself chiefly to the hearts of the lost, anxious, and unsettled; the teacher, on the other hand, instructs and leads on the saints. At Samaria, for instance, Philip the Evangelist preached, and many believed on the Lord and were baptized. Soon Philip leaves them—he is transported to the desert; but teachers come down to Samaria from Jerusalem and minister Christ to the converts.

In this way the teacher is a higher order of gift, so to say, than the evangelist; he engages the soul with the perfections and the glories of Christ, who is the only source of real nourishment for the spiritual life of a believer. The teacher knows where the treasures are, for he himself is in the enjoyment of them, and he has the ability to demonstrate them. In this he differs from his brethren in whom the grace to teach has not been filled with it; but they cannot so tell of it as that the spiritual can profit; while such is the teacher’s gift that he can speak for his neighbor’s good unto edification (Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3). He speaks, moreover, with conscious authority—in fact, he is exhorted to speak as the “oracles of God”; he must know the mind of God, and, assured of it, he is to disclose it (1 Peter 4:11). Of course, if he is not prepared thus to teach, he should not, I gather, teach at all. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that even the teaching of a Paul, apostolic as it was, was measured by the Scriptures, which the Bereans searched, and for which act they were, in comparison with the Thessalonians, “MORE NOBLE” (Acts 17:11).

The evangelist leads the soul to Christ; the teacher detains it, and ministers to it of Christ; the pastor’s godly care is, that it does not wander away from Christ. The evangelist and pastor are engaged for Christ’s glory with the individual; the teacher with truth for it.

There is just one thought which I would offer you from Acts 15:—You remember our noticing four {five are named} teachers {and prophets} in the assembly at Antioch (Acts 13), and we said that if the assembly was gathered for edification, one or more of these four would be such as the Holy Ghost would use to give a suited word at the time {suited occasion}.

Now we find Judas and Silas—not mentioned among the four {the five}—going to Antioch. If there was exclusiveness, or rather if all the teachers {and prophets} were not the common property of the assembly at Antioch, as of all the assemblies, then it would have been “irregular” for Judas and Silas to speak in that gathering. But they did exhort, comfort, and confirm the brethren. And such should be the attitude which all the gifts of the Lord should maintain today, and the saints to them. However, it is not so; and, indeed, will never be again! But in the midst of the ruin, let us be thankful for any whom the Lord gives us; and if we have none at all, let us adore Him for His word, and for the divine teacher, the Holy Ghost, who ever remains with us to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us.

How ARE WE TO KNOW THESE GIFTS? for even the youthful gathering at Thessalonica was exhorted to “know them which labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and esteem them very highly in love, for their works’ sake” (1 Thess. 5:12-13). I reply by asking, how do you recognize a believer in Christ? Is it simply by what he says? No; there is divine intelligence given you, by which you discern Christ in him; so also, the spiritual will discern the gifts by their works; and esteem them for their work’s sake.

If the individual be spiritual, he will be occupied with Christ and not with his gift, and thus commend himself to the godly; and so, if saints be walking “in the Spirit,” they will see the gift in the individual, and will profit by it. I remember hearing a servant of God express the idea thus—“It will not be the blind leading the blind, nor the seeing leading the blind, but the seeing leading the seeing.” There are four evils on this score which prevail in the present day:

- (1) Unsent men assume the place of the Lord’s servants;
- (2) Saints slavishly follow, and thus encourage them;
- (3) Saints, failing to recognize true gifts, are losers; and
- (4) Real gifts, discouraged by the ruinous aspect of things, hide themselves, and thus exhibit lack of confidence in the Lord.

I find other gifts referred to in Romans 12, the gift of exhorting (v. 8). The style of the Apostle then changes, “He that giveth,” and he introduces the liberal giver and the diligent ruler. To the last we shall refer directly.

So far as we have gone we see

- (1) That all these gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and exhorters, proceed from the Lord—were never appointed by men.
- (2) The children of God are simply to know them, to own them, to profit by them, and to help them in carnal things where they need it.
- (3) We have not such authoritative persons now as apostles and prophets, the others are still supplied by the Lord; and
- (4) Even the apostles never appointed the evangelists, pastors, etc., the Lord alone gives them. This I must press, for we are coming now to see another order of ministry of a very different character whom the apostles or their delegates did appoint.

5—Offices in Local Gatherings of Saints

On this part we must be very brief lest we tire you. There are three sets of ministers pointed out in the Acts and the Epistles, who differ from those we have been reviewing in a few important particulars, which we may learn by referring to the scriptures which speak of them.

1. And first, “THE SEVEN” (those chosen in Acts 6, and called in Acts 21:8 “the seven”) have been long known in ecclesiastical history as “deacons.” Although they are not so named in the Acts, yet it is generally supposed they are the same class spoken of in Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3.

In the portion last quoted the diaconate is an “office”¹¹ and he who holds it is to be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a good conscience; his wife is to be grave and faithful, and he is to rule his own house well, etc.

Now, what was this “office?” This we learn from Acts 6—many poor and needy saints were soon found in the assembly at Jerusalem, and it would appear that the apostles not only ministered the word, but attended also to the temporal necessities of the saints in their midst—using money to meet those necessities from the richer brethren who had placed the money at their disposal (Acts 4). What a reality is Christianity! Jealousy of nationalities still existing, the Grecians murmured against the Hebrews because Grecian widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. The occasion was used for appointing fit persons to attend to that business, namely, taking charge of the collections for the poor saints, and judiciously and discreetly apportioning them. In the case before us the apostles permitted the gathering at Jerusalem to select such as they thought fit for “this business,” and seven being chosen, the apostles appointed them.

A very valuable office is this; and when exercised in subjection to the Lord, who always cares for His own, much may be done to rebuke idleness on the one hand, and to comfort and help the needy on the other.

The wife and children of the deacon are, I judge, associated with him in many ways, in the carrying out of details. Hence their qualifications are so strictly laid down (1 Tim. 3). They live in the place; move in and out among the saints, so as to find out in the gentlest ways where need is on the one hand, and who are those that may be asked to meet it on the other. Hence he is not to be a money-lover; nor his wife a slanderer! O that we knew many of such men today! It would be our place to own them where we find them, and to thank God for them—but, not having apostolic authority, we cannot appoint them.

A deacon, then, is one that “serves tables”—attending to the bodily needs of the poor saints at the local gathering in which he meets, and he ministers (or serves) in temporal things. (In this way, I suppose, Phoebe was a deaconess, (Rom. 16:1) The deacon may be, besides, a person gifted by the Lord to minister the word, as Stephen and Philip were; in this he would be responsible to the Lord, and to none other; in his office as deacon he is servant of the local assembly. If he removed to another place, he would be “out of office.” An evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher is a gift everywhere; a deacon is in office—and that for temporal things—in his city or town only.

elders.

Again, in Titus 1:5, we find Titus left in the island of Crete to ordain elders in every city.

From these two scriptures we learn

(1) That the appointment of elders was a purely apostolic function, accomplished by the Apostles themselves or by their delegates;

(2) Not one elder, but elders, were appointed; and not to a diocese or district, but to the gathering (we saw on a previous occasion that in apostolic times there was only one assembly of Christians in any given place, which was an expression of the one Assembly or church of God); and such men would be specially guided by the Holy Ghost to walk before the infant assemblies as “patterns to the flock.”

From 1 Timothy 5:7 it appears that some of the elders had gift to “labor in the word and doctrine”; but their essential function seems to have been to rule, direct, advise, and guide. I dare say that their judgment was instructed by the Holy Ghost, so as to detect improprieties among the saints—as, for instance, in late attendance at or absence from meetings, in dress, and in other matters of detail in daily life.

Further, the very persons called elders, whom the Apostle Paul summoned from Ephesus to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:17) are exhorted as overseers (v. 28). Now the word “overseers” is translated from ἐπισκόπους; (Episkopous), which occurs also in Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:7, where it is rendered “Bishop.” Clearly, then, the elders were bishops.

We see, therefore, that the elders (πρεσβύτεροι = presbuteroi, literally elderly persons) were the Bishops (ἐπίσκοποι = episkopoi), or overseers, in the various assemblies. Neither these nor the deacons should be confounded with gifts; inasmuch as they required apostolic appointment which the gifts did not need; they were located; the gifts were not.

You will now question the meaning of the subscription at the end of the Epistle to Titus in our English version {KJV} “It was written to Titus, ordained first bishop of the church of the Cretians, from Nicopolis of Macedonia.” Well, it just means nothing, for it does not occur in the Greek text.

The fact is simple enough. Titus was authorized by the apostle to go through Crete and accomplish a work—appointing bishops {Titus 1:5,12}—which Paul only or his substitute could do; and far from Titus being the resident bishop of the Cretians, he was directed by Paul to meet him at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12).

For us, therefore, to appoint elders today, we need, for each city, two things which where can we find?

(1) Apostles whom the HOLY GHOST used authoritatively for making overseers; and

(2) The flock—one assembly of all the saints in the place over whom to appoint them. Will any dare to say we have either? There are, thank God, holy men among us, who by their jealous care for the spiritual growth and Christian walk of the saints, commend themselves to the godly. And are we not to submit to such in the Lord? Surely. Should we not thankfully seek their counsel, refer to their sober judgment, and imitate their Christ-like walk? May the Lord, in His grace, help us to do so, and may the number of such examples to believers be greatly increased!

And let me urge my younger brethren, who are gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus {Matt. 18:20; cp. 1 Cor. 5:4}, and gathered according to His word (where meaningless modes of appointment are avoided) let me admonish you to esteem such grave, elderly, godly men very highly for their work’s sake. Had we apostolic power, there are some who would doubtless be appointed, and then be titled “elders.” But are

we not to profit by such, because they are not thus inducted into office and thus made to possess a title? It is as much ours to submit as it is theirs to rule; but both need something beyond a blind acquiescence on the one hand, and official interference on the other; each requires the one to act towards the other as if acting for the LORD.

Let us bear in mind, beloved brethren, that ministry was never intended to bestow importance before men upon them in whom God deposited gifts. His aim has been His glory in Christ. And indeed, when we remember that we carry along "the flesh" in us, which the Holy Ghost can never use, how much need there is for walking softly? The apostle Paul exhorts (Rom. 12), "I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think (of himself or of others) more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

We are all brethren, and members one of another {1 Cor. 12:12, etc.}, although having gifts differing. In short, if instead of his gift, the servant of God is occupied with Christ, he will see much to abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes; and far from asserting his gift he would just consider the glory of Christ in the well-being of his brethren. Indeed, every servant of God should bear in mind that, unless the living God comes in and owns his ministry, it is profitless. The sower puts the seed into the ground, and it dies. GOD must quicken it, or there it remains. How this should take the importance out of those of us who think something of ourselves because God uses us. And so, if we walk in the Spirit we will learn to value what God gives us through His servants, encourage them in their services, and would seek never to puff them up by false adulation. Further, our quiet secret prayer to God would be for their own growth in divine things; we would watch their walk with godly jealousy, remembering how Satan aims specially at those whom his Captor, our Captain of Salvation, has placed in the front rank of His aggressive army.

What a precious theme is ministry! How it takes us into the very presence of God, who hath reconciled; of Christ, who maintains His body in the earth; of the Holy Ghost, who is here below directing according to His will.

The Lord Himself will soon descend from heaven for us, beloved brethren; while He leaves us here, He graciously provides for our spiritual growth, and He strengthens us to be His living witnesses, each in our own sphere; but in all we have been considering there is nothing to clash in the least with His own blessed promise, "I come quickly."

And now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we (His poor, unworthy servants) may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming (1 John 2:28).

Summary

(1) The way of the Holy Ghost is to instruct souls respecting their personal standing in Christ; their corporate relationships to each other; and the presence, as a divine FACT, of the Spirit of God in the assembly upon the earth, before developing ministry.

(2) The source of Christian ministry is in God, through Christ the exalted head over all things, and hence the sin of interference on the part of man.

(3) All believers form a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices unto God: but ministry proceeds from God to man; and its object is the magnifying of the person of Christ, and God in Him.

(4) The directorship of ministry, as well as power for its efficiency, is vested in the HOLY GHOST.

(5) Pastors and teachers are gifts for the whole church everywhere, and not for a church only; the field for the exercise of the gift of the evangelist is the world, and all should seek to establish saints in CHRIST.

(6) Bishops (or elders) were located (not traveling) functionaries, who, being divinely qualified to rule in, and to be ensamples to, the flock, were appointed by the apostles, or by their commissioned substitutes. Such, if known now, should be submitted to; but, without apostolic authority, cannot be formally appointed.

(7) Deacons (and probably deaconesses) were chosen by the assemblies, and appointed by the apostles, to be servants of the gatherings, seeing to the temporal need of the saints, etc.

Appendix: Women in Connection With the Christian Ministry

There is not the smallest matter of detail in our everyday walk for which the word of God does not afford light and guidance; and if we be entirely led by it we need not deviate from the straight line in the least degree.

Masters and servants, parents and children, husbands and wives, teachers and taught have, each and all, their several lines of conduct laid down for them by GOD; and if we are His children we should certainly discover His will, and we should do IT. Obedience and a will, not our own but His, should practically characterize the saints of God. We are not our own, but bought with a price, therefore we are to glorify GOD in our bodies, which are His (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We delight to sing of the grace of God in Christ; by which we are saved; but do we remember that being thus saved we are not to please ourselves but God? But to please another we need to consult his will, for if not we may, with our best motives, and most industrious efforts, be doing the very opposite which he desired. So to please God we should honestly set aside our notions—from whatever source they might have been derived—and endeavor to discover His mind from His word, and then, by the power of the Holy Ghost, do it.

I believe that if such a course of absolute subjection to God were pursued, Christian women would never dare to leave the place God has allotted to them, and intrude into men's; neither would Christian men, to whom the Lord has committed any gift leave their niche unoccupied for women to fill. And lastly, if subjection to God were practiced by all the saints, then those Christian women who so recklessly assume a place, which even common modesty—not to say the word of the Lord—forbids, would soon retire into becoming shamefacedness, receiving no countenance from the saints.

Of course I need say nothing of a worldly woman taking such a place, for just as with worldly men who intrude themselves into “the ministry” for the sake of a “living,” the world will be sure to give its patronage! And for what reason? Because such conduct is opposed to God the Father. Yes; I repeat, that whatever is opposed to the mind of God will be sure to receive the world’s patronage, and vice versa.

Now, those of my readers who took pains to notice the conduct of the Holy Ghost regarding ministry, as it is shown in the Acts and in the Epistles, must have observed that not one instance is recorded of a woman having been either an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher. Such an omission is certainly very significant, and I do wonder that Christian women are not more careful in avoiding, in the nineteenth century, what the Holy Ghost did not introduce in the first! Should this word meet their eye, may they ponder it. The Lord will not tolerate lawlessness.

But there is not only negative evidence against the ungodliness of women assuming the place of God’s gifts for the church (pastors and teachers) or for the world (evangelists), but positive testimony is also against it.

The idea of a minister (or servant) of Christ always carries with it, to my mind, one of authority. Hence the expression, “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor. 5), suggests the thought of one sent by Christ, to speak for Christ, to act in the stead of Christ. What a position! How careful, prayerful, and self-renunciating should the ambassador be! The result is that such in the name of the Lord should have a hearing; the church receiving with meekness the word through the teacher; and the evangelist must be faithful in his message to the world, “whether they will hear or whether they will forbear.” I say the true servant of Jesus Christ is, in a very important though divine sense, one in authority.

Now, the positive teaching of Scripture regarding the woman is that “she is to be in subjection, [to] learn in silence with all subjection; not to speak in the assembly.” “For I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (cp. 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11).

From these Scriptures, then, it is very evident that

- (1) If the assembly be gathered as an assembly, in which teachers may teach, or exhorters may exhort, women are NOT to speak;
- (2) Whereas a teacher may invite saints to a meeting over which he may assume responsibility, and may instruct them as an authoritative teacher—the woman is not allowed to take such a place; and
- (3) It is equally contrary to the mind of the Lord for the woman to appear before the world as an authoritative evangelist.

THEN, HAS THE WOMAN NO PLACE IN THIS BLESSED WORK? O yes, she, has.

The Lord did not find fault with one who went into her city and invited the men to come and see the man who told her all things that ever she did—Jesus the Christ (John 4). After His resurrection, He sent Mary to His disciples with a message of His resurrection (John 20); Dorcas made clothes for the poor (Acts 9); Priscilla (with her husband, Aquila) took Apollos and instructed him more perfectly in the way of God (Acts 18:2); before the canon of Scripture was complete, God was pleased to make known His mind by prophets, as we have seen; and, it seems from Acts 21 That the four daughters of Philip the Evangelist prophesied. Now we must not forget that PHILIP was the evangelist—the daughters were not evangelists. It is said that they prophesied; and, taken in connection with the revealed mind of the Lord respecting the non-publicity and the unassuming mode in which women should conduct themselves, I see no reason for deducing the highly improper, yea ungodly, conduct of women taking a place which the Lord in His sovereignty did not apportion to them. But to prophesy did not necessarily need a prominent place; for Agabus the prophet told of Paul’s imminent suffering and thus prophesied; but could he not have uttered his prediction in private? And so I judge could Philip’s daughters. At any rate, we have neither prophets nor prophetesses now. But further, Paul speaks of certain women in Romans 16 connected with his ministry: Phoebe was a servant (deaconess) of the gathering at Cenchrea; Priscilla was a helper (v. 3); Mary bestowed much labor on the servants of Christ (v. 5), etc.

I conclude, from the above references

- (1) That where the grace and the time are afforded by the Lord, godly women may be of immense service in going about and inviting people to preachings, lectures, etc., thus being “helpers” to evangelists and teachers; and if such were active, much expense might be avoided in the use of printed bills, etc.;
- (2) Such women as have the time and grace will find abundance to do in visiting and helping on young converts, comforting the sick, finding out real cases of need among such as do not tell it to the public, and—securing means from those who delight to use their money for the Lord—such godly women may relieve the poor needy ones;
- (3) Further, they may have Bible classes at their houses, or in Sunday Schools, for instructing females or children. But I would seek to impress upon my sisters who would be evangelists or teachers, and my brethren who encourage them, that the authority of the Lord Jesus has never been given for such conduct.

To say that it must be right, because souls get blessing by it, is bad reasoning, and dangerous; for in the same way a Roman Catholic might argue—for we know that God as Sovereign uses His word preached even by Papists. O that the glory of Christ may be the sole object of every dear sister and also of every brother! for then His will will be submitted to; His mind obtained upon every point; His word will be the only guide. If the Lord intended to do without women in His service He would take them away immediately after they were converted; but no, He graciously leaves them here to perform their functions in “the body.” But, as in the natural body, certain delicate organs, unobtrusively, unheard, and unfelt (till they become diseased), perform their functions for the good of the whole structure, in submission to the nervous center’s presiding over them, so in “the body—the church,” Christ, the Lord, has plenty for subject women to do (or to suffer), but they must be subject to Him; and there is something seriously wrong—there is decidedly some spiritual disease—when she whom the Lord would have to be remarkable for her modesty arrogates to herself a position of authority.