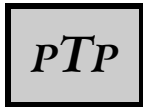


***The Ruin of  
the Church,  
  
Eldership,  
  
and  
Ministry of the Word  
by Gift***

***Three related subjects bearing  
on the present state of the  
church and especially on those who  
profess to acknowledge that state.***



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# ***Explanation of Footnotes***

This book contains three kinds of footnotes:

1. If a footnote is enclosed in brackets [], I have written that footnote.
2. If the footnote has been enclosed in braces {}, that footnote was not written by me, or in *that* article by the writer quoted, but either by himself elsewhere or by some other writer.
3. If a footnote is not enclosed by either brackets [] or braces {}, the writer quoted has written that footnote in the article being quoted.

This explanation applies also to brackets and braces in the main text.

## ***Preface***

The three subjects brought together in this book are not as unrelated as some might at first think, especially in view of the fact that the great majority of Christians have never heard or realized that the church is in ruins. Nor is that a surprise because most do not know what the church is as constituted by God. Not knowing *that*, how could one understand the ruin of it?

Not understanding the nature of this ruin and the Christian's path in it, and/or the refusing to acknowledge the truth about the ruin, may result in two quite different courses.

1. Denial of the ruin may lead to pretension to set up what is believed to have been the practice in the early days of the church regarding offices -- modified, however, so as to set up the clergy, which in effect combines office and gift.
2. Affirmation of the ruin may lead to:
  - a. the false conclusion that there is no corporate testimony possible;
  - b. or, such unscriptural teachings that virtually parallels the ruin of the church, as:
    - `the ruin of the brethren'
    - `ministerial ruin'

There is an *agenda*, an objective to be gained, in these abuses of God's word. When we depart from the teaching of God's Word, substituting our own notions, we may be sure that provision is being made for the flesh to work -- while attempting to clothe this with a scriptural sound in order to claim that it comes from God. As an example of doing this, take the case where someone professes to speak for God (prophecy) in the assembly when he has no gift for it. What is that? It pretends to be ministry. But it is the flesh. So it is *ministerial flesh* pretending to be led of God's Spirit. This is one example of how the flesh clothes itself in the things of God. Worse still is the development of teachings to sanctify such abuses. Thus the flesh feeds the flesh and the decline is helped along by sanctifying that which fosters an accelerating decline.

In the present volume we will review what was taught concerning the ruin of the church as seen in testimony, office and gifts during the 1800s when the truth concerning these matters was recovered to the Lord's people.

***Part 1:***

***The Ruin of the Church  
Seen in Responsibility  
on Earth***





## ***Chapter 1.1***

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### ***I Will Explain What I Mean by the Church***

(by J. N. Darby)

The most serious evil that there is in all these reasonings, by the help of which it is sought to discredit the views put forth on the ruin of the Church, is that the relationships and very existence of the Church are thereby denied. . .

The idea of the Church has no existence in the mind of the greater part of those who oppose my views. Others have such an idea of it as makes them take the fruits of the sin of man for those of the grace of God.

If it were felt that there is a Church, the bride of Christ, a holy body formed down here on earth by the presence of the Holy Spirit, the reasonings by which it is sought to deny the ruin of the Church would be, for the greater part, impossible; and it would not even be attempted to deny the ruin in the midst of which we find ourselves.

I will explain myself as to what I mean by the Church. The Church is a body subsisting in unity here below, formed by the power of God by the gathering together of His children in union with Christ who is its Head; a body which derives its existence and its unity from the work and the presence of the Holy Spirit come down from heaven, consequently on the ascension of Jesus the Son of God, and of His sitting at the right hand of the Father after having accomplished redemption.

This Church, united by the Spirit, as the body to the Head, to this Jesus seated at the Father's right hand, will, no doubt, be manifested in its totality, when Christ shall be manifested in His glory; but, meanwhile, as being formed by the presence of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, it is essentially looked at, in the word of God, as subsisting in its unity on the earth. It is the habitation of God by the Spirit, essentially heavenly in its relationships, but having an earthly pilgrimage, as to the scene in which it is actually found and in which it ought to manifest the nature of the glory of Christ, as His epistle of commendation to the world, for it represents Him and is in His place. It is the bride of the Lamb, in its privileges and calling. It is presented as a chaste virgin to Christ for the day of the marriage of the Lamb. Evidently this last thought will have its accomplishment in resurrection; but, what characterizes the Church, as being quickened according to the power which has raised Christ from among the dead and set Him at the right hand of God, is the realization and manifestation of the glory of its Head by the power of the Holy Ghost, before Jesus its Head is revealed in Person.

Those who compose the Church have other relationships besides. They are children of Abraham. They are the house of God over which Christ is head as Son. But these last characters do not detract from what we have been saying; still less do they annul it.

At the beginning, the truth of the Church, powerfully set forth by the apostle Paul, was as the center of the spiritual movement; and those who were not perfect, still attached themselves to this centre, though at a greater distance. The Church is, rather, the circle nearest to the only true centre, Christ Himself. It was His body, His bride. This truth, lost now for the generality of Christians, (and it is a ground of shame), has become a means of separation, like the tabernacle of Moses, set up outside the unfaithful camp (Ex. 33); because, if, according to the principle of the unity of the body taught by the apostle, one acts outside the world, most Christians are unwilling to follow, and, while keeping up worldliness, they cannot do so. How, indeed, could they gather outside of that which they are keeping up?

This lack of faith has a sorrowful consequence. Relationships with God are taken up, belonging, it is true, to those of which the Church is composed, but inferior to those of the Church itself, and they are taken in order to form with them a system which is put in opposition to the most precious of all the relationships of the Church with God. People insist that the children of God are Abraham's children, which is true; but they wish to place them at this level, in order to deny the position of the bride of Christ. They will have it that they are branches grafted in, in place of the Jews, so as to reduce them to the level of the blessing and principles of the Old Testament, and this, in order to avoid the responsibility of the position in which God has set us, and, thereby, the necessity of a confession of our fall. They allow, in a general sense, that we are the house of God, which is true; a house in which there are vessels to dishonor: and they make use of this truth to justify a state of things which has left outside everything that can belong to the affections and the heart of a bride. Let Christians give heed to it!

Hence, the postponement of the return of Christ to epochs which are connected with the judgment He will execute on an unfaithful house and a rebellious world. Hence also, the loss of the desire for His coming, a desire peculiar to the bride and inspired by the Spirit who dwells in and animates her.

The proofs of the existence of such a Church are beyond all contradiction, and, although I have already produced them elsewhere, it is good, even if it were but for one soul, to recall some of them, so that they may act on the conscience.<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:31-33.

## ***Chapter 1.2***

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### ***The Fall of the Church***

#### ***The Church Fell Very Early***

The state of the church fell with the departure of the apostles, and even in their time. All, says the apostle, seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ; and John and Jude both testify that the failure was come in their days. The history of the church shows it utterly fallen in doctrine and practice at once, as all that had been entrusted to man ever had. It is all very well to talk of the primitive church with those who know nothing about it. But the doctrine and practice were such as are not fit to be put upon a drawing-room table for common reading, and that what was read in the churches forty or fifty years after John's death; one hundred years after, this corruption was general.

That superstition and spiritual ignorance governed the "Fathers'" minds, there is not the smallest doubt. Milner in his Church History admits that not one ever held the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith. I should go farther, but let that suffice. It became quite early the practice to get drunk in the churches in honor of the saints whose memorial had taken the place of that of the demi-god on the same site. In Africa Augustine tried to put a stop to it, and was nearly stoned for his pains; he excuses "the primitive church" by saying, they thought it better to get drunk in honor of a saint than in honor of a demon.<sup>2</sup>

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2. *Collected Writings* 32:187, 188. [There is no reestablishment of the church to its original place (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:184-191, 195-198, 220.)]

## ***Explanation of What is Meant by the Ruin of the Church as Seen in Testimony***

(Collected quotations)

In this section we are not considering the church viewed as Christ builds (Matt. 16:18), <sup>3</sup> but as professing Christians build (1 Cor. 3:11-18). <sup>4</sup> These are two different aspects. There is a scripture view of the church as **heavenly** <sup>5</sup> but Scripture also views the church on earth in responsibility, subject to judgment (1 Corinthians, Rev. 2, 3, for example).

There are many who would immediately object to the phrase "church on earth," claiming that there is no such thing as that, but only churches, thus seeking to avoid what is really the Scripture truth about the ruin of the church on earth, as seen in responsibility, and our part in that failure and ruin:

They admit that there were Churches, but they say that there never was a Church. They feel that, if once this were admitted, the truth respecting our state must necessarily be admitted also; but, satisfied with themselves, they deny the existence of a Church of Christ [God] on earth, rather than confess their sin. <sup>6</sup>

You see that this teaching about the ruin of the church on earth, as seen in responsibility, is very important; for it involves knowing something of what the church is, what it has become, and what our place and responsibility before God are, in view of that ruin. We need to know what has been ruined, what has not been ruined, and how to carry out the mind of God in this situation, so as to please Him.

The heart and conscience must acknowledge that the Church ought to be one, so as to be able to glorify the Lord on the earth; a spiritual man will own this without any need of reasoning. But one must produce testimony from God for those who will not have it so, and in order that those who desire nothing but the glory of Christ may be strengthened and be able to close the mouths of adversaries. I do not call adversaries all those who hold contrary opinions. There are many children of God who are ignorant of the truth on this subject; there are also many who deceive themselves and who, dazzled by the pretension of those who oppose the truth, are carried away unwittingly. <sup>7</sup>

It will not do to object to the word "ruin." The thing meant by that word is, in

3. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:95 deals with the objection that since Christ builds, the church cannot be in ruin.

4. See *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 1:181 for more on this distinction.

5. From the instant that the church loses sight of its heavenly calling, it loses, humanly speaking, all (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 2:378).

And the ruin of the church has come in by practically saying, "My Lord delays His coming" (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 25:205).

6. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:272.

7. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:272.

fact, taught in Scripture -- in the same way that, though the word "trinity" does not appear in Scripture, what is meant by that word *is* taught therein. Why the objection?

These objections, so many times repeated, seem to me puerile and only betray a conscience which does not like to face the question. The word "ruin" is used in a moral sense, as well as in a material sense: and it is evident that such is the case, when it is applied to the Church. If I say that a man is ruined, the man still exists; If I say his reputation is ruined, it is not that he has none, but that it is a bad one. If I say that a thing has been the ruin of such a man, it is clear that I speak of the moral effect of such or such a thing, and I do not mean that the man is no longer in existence . . . Hence, when I say that the Church is ruined, or when I speak of the ruin of the Church, it is saying that the Church is not at all in its normal state; it is as if, for example, I said that the health of a man was ruined.<sup>8</sup>

How can anyone deny the obvious ruin of the church as seen in testimony?

The universal church of the elect manifested on earth was to show forth in the world the glory of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as a city situated on the top of a mountain; it was to be the salt of the earth -- and all that in its unity, being composed of all those who believe. That is what existed in the beginning. I do not say that, if some of its parts detach themselves from it, as a society, the church ceases to exist, as Mr. Rochat makes me to say. What I say is, that corrupt men, "marked out beforehand for this sentence," have got unnoticed into the church; that the mystery of lawlessness already worked at the beginning, and that the aggregate, the body of the church on earth, is in a state of disorganization and corruption. I say that it has ceased to manifest on earth that unto which God had called it. The fault is not with God, but with man. No; God is not responsible for this, although by means of it His counsels be accomplished. If there is a fault (and fault there must be somewhere, if the good that God had done has been marred and corrupted), there is responsibility; someone is guilty. Is it denied that the aggregate of the church on earth is corrupted and disorganized, and that the testimony which God had established in the unity of the church of believers is marred and has failed in the world? If it is denied, I ask, where is that testimony? Why does God put an end to the dispensation, if the testimony which ought to have been rendered to His glory subsists in all its force? But if, in effect, corruption and disorganization do exist in the church, if the testimony of God to the world scarcely subsists, if the name of Christ is blasphemed in the midst of the world by means of Christians -- [i.e., by means] of the church, to deny the responsibility<sup>9</sup> of men, of Christians, is indisputably the most evident antinomianism.<sup>10</sup>

God has two objects regarding Christians which need to be clear in our minds:

God has proposed to Himself two great objects with regard to a Christian: the one, to save him, the other, to manifest in him His own glory. These two objects

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8. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:272, 273.

9. See *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 14:88, 89.

10. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 1:251, 252.

will be fully attained when the Christian is in glory.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, his salvation is certain, because God is true. But, on the other hand, it thus becomes the duty of such as enjoy this salvation, to be on earth the living witnesses of God's glory, by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. It is the same with the church: it is saved\*<sup>12</sup> but it is its duty and its privilege to manifest here below the glory of Him who saved it, and who dwells in it by the Holy Spirit. It is here that the responsibility of such as are saved finds its place. The rigid Calvinist only sees the accomplished salvation of the Church--an infinitely precious truth, the results of which in heavenly glory can never fail; but he does not see the establishment of the church here below -- that by God Himself -- as depositary of the glory of God, and under the responsibility of man. The Arminian, on the contrary, concludes from this responsibility of Christians the uncertainty of their salvation, thus weakening the counsels of God, the eternal efficacy of the work of Christ, and all the sense and force of the seal of the Spirit, who would be bearing witness to an error, if after all we were not eternally saved.

There is a responsibility which results from grace, from the position which it has made for us. If God has adopted me for His child, I am bound to walk as a child, without questioning whether I shall always be a child. Thus God may Himself secure the accomplishment of His glory in His elect, and outwardly also by their means; or He may leave the manifestation of His glory to their faithfulness as His children. All these suppositions will be realized, the glory will be fully manifested in His elect, when Christ shall have glorified them. Then also will they fully glorify Him, as the angels do. But, in the meantime, God has entrusted His glory here below to the church, as He had of old entrusted it to the Jews. Christians are faithful to this responsibility, by the Spirit who dwells in them, and who acts with efficacy, if He be not grieved. This therefore concerns the whole church, because the Holy Ghost dwells as the one Spirit in the Church. And although the evil may begin by one individual only, belonging to one particular church, it is here a question of principles which corrupt the whole lump in general, such, for instance, as a Judaizing spirit.

I deem it important to notice here that all the epistles which speak of ruin, of false principles which are the occasion for judgment, do not speak of a church, but of Christians in general -- of the state of that which is called Christendom.

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11. The greater part of the difficulty, which in general presents itself to the minds of the faithful on this subject, consists in their confounding the intentions of God with regard to the dispensation with His counsels regarding the faithful found in it. These counsels can never fail in their effect, but the dispensation itself may pass away and come to an end (although having been to the glory of God, in that it has displayed His ways), because the unfaithfulness of man has rendered it unfit to be the means of manifesting any longer this glory. Then God, who foreknows all that He purposes to accomplish, substitutes for it another dispensation in which man is placed in another kind of trial, and thus all the ways of God are manifested, and His manifold wisdom shines in its true brightness even in the heavenlies (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 1:169).

12. \* Note to translation -- It is more exact to say, when individuals are saved, because the church is looked at as a new creation. But the general principle of the statement has remained here.

Already in early 1827 J. N. Darby understood "the fall of the church."<sup>13</sup> And in 1828 he wrote:

Do we not believe that it was, as a body, utterly departed from Him?<sup>14</sup>

Again:

As to the ruin of the church, the theory came for me after the consciousness of it, and even now, the theory is but a small thing to my mind; it is a burden which one bears . . .<sup>15</sup>

What I felt from the beginning, and began with, was this: the Holy Ghost remains, and therefore, the essential principle of unity with His presence for (the fact we are now concerned in) *wherever* two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. When this is really sought, there will certainly be blessing by His presence. We have found it so, most sweetly and graciously, who have met separately here.<sup>16</sup>

Restoration to the original state of the church on earth is not possible.<sup>17</sup> While exponents of "the charismatic renewal," and Pentecostals,<sup>18</sup> seem to think otherwise, there have been, and are, persons who recognize the ruin and proceed to abuse this fact:

Do they say all is in ruins? Well, do they take part in it as Daniel did [Dan. 9], or do they fancy they are going to be something out of it, and so deny that it is so? The ruin is our ruin if we are identified with Christ's glory in the world. We may, if enabled, separate the precious from the vile, and if so be blessed in faithfulness; if continuing humble, the Head can never fail those who wait on Him.<sup>19</sup>

I may add, that I know it is alleged that the church is now in such ruins that scriptural order according to the unity of the body [of Christ] cannot be maintained. Then let the objectors avow, as honest men, that they seek unscriptural order, or rather disorder. But in truth it is impossible to meet at all in that case to break bread, except in defiance of God's word; for scripture says, "We being many are one body: for we are all partakers of that one loaf." We profess to be one body whenever we break bread; scripture knows nothing else. And they will find scripture too strong and perfect a bond for man's reasoning to break it.<sup>20</sup>

There is just as much wisdom and [moral] power from God for us to meet the state of ruin in which we now are, as there was at the first when He set up His

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13. See R. A. Huebner, *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, Present Truth Publishers: Morganville, p. 18, vol. 1 (1991).

14. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 1:29.

15. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:42.

16. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 20:189; *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:94.

17. See *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 1:144, 145.

18. See my *The Word of God Versus the Charismatic Renewal*.

19. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:388.

20. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:425.



church. And that is what we have to lean upon.<sup>21</sup>

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21. *Notes and Jottings*, p. 81.

## *The Loss of First Love*

(by J. N. Darby)

We see, consequently, in every one of them [the assemblies in Rev. 2 and 3] the peculiar stamp of responsibility. Then, observe how He commences this Ephesian address, by touching upon every point that He can in any way approve of, before He brings out the opposite side of the picture. "I know thy works, thy labor, and thy patience." What a blessing that He does know all about us, even "the thoughts and intents of the heart!" "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Now mark another important principle. What must Christ necessarily be jealous about but His love to the church, which was stronger than death? It is utterly impossible that He can forget His love to the church, and therefore just as impossible that He can be satisfied without the return of her love to Him; for, remember, that it is only love that can satisfy love. The very reproach He makes brings out the strength of His love to the church, which cannot rest till it gets the same from her; for He cannot cool down to be satisfied with a feeble return of His love, however much the church may have cooled down in her thoughts about Christ's love to her. There may be still much outward fruit in "works, and labor, and patience"; but let the toil and labor be what it may, the spring of it all is gone--You have left your first love; there is the great mischief. It is no matter how much you toil and labor, if love to Christ be not the motive of all your service, it will only be, as the apostle says, "like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," which dies with the sound thereof.

Here, then, in Ephesus, we get the first great principle of failure, and therefore the great general judgment which came upon the whole church. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works [see how He brings them back to the point of their departure], or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." He cannot allow that to remain in the world which fails to show forth the great love wherewith He loved the church; for if He did, He would not be "the faithful and true witness." This principle of tender, faithful reproach is the blessed proof that His love never grows cold, however much ours may fail.

In this respect the Lord's way of dealing with individual souls is exactly the same as with the church. He takes notice of all departure from Him, but the door is always open for "repentance," and when the sin is judged, and seen in the light in which God sees it, then there is nothing to hinder immediate restoration. The moment the conscience bows under the sin, and confesses it, then it gets into an upright position; an uprightness of soul, where evil has been, is shown in the consciousness of evil, and power to confess it; and therefore the church of God, or an individual soul, must get into this state of uprightness before God, in order for Him to restore it; Job 33:23-26. Get sin judged in the conscience, and then there is the revelation of the unfailling love of God to meet the need. It is thus in the daily

details of Christian life. Judgments may pass upon His people, but His chastening love is seen in it all.

And thus is learned the reason why the Lord reproaches the church for leaving her first love. There is in it the revelation of His perfect and unchanged love shining through the condemnation of their state. And do we not see this dawn in the natural relationships of life? Take husband and wife. A wife may take care of the house and fulfil all her duties so as to leave nothing undone for which her husband could find fault; but if her love for him has diminished, will all her service satisfy him if his love to her be the same as at the first? No. Well, then, if it will not do for him, it will not do for Christ: He must have the reflection of His love. He says, I am not blind to your good qualities, but I want yourself. Love, which was once the spring of every action, is gone; and therefore the service is valueless. If love is waning, the rest is as nothing. It is true that our love cannot answer worthily, but still it may answer truly, for at least Christ looks for undividedness of object, though there be not adequateness of affection. There must be a dividedness of heart if there is instability of affection. This was the secret of all the failure at Ephesus. Undividedness of heart as regarded the object of affection had been lost, singleness of eye was gone, and the perfect reflection of that love which had laid hold of the church for Himself was gone. Still, while Christ says, "I have somewhat against thee," He marks everything that is good. "Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." Well, then, it might be said, What can the Lord want more? He says, I want herself. Remember this as regards the church. Then He says, "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." To me this is a very solemn but touching word to us, for we have gone much farther from our first love than they, still the heart of him that is faithful finds a certain refuge in Christ, for his soul finds in the very reproach an infallible proof of His unchanged love.<sup>22</sup>

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22. *Collected Writings* 5:281-283.

## ***Chapter 1.3***

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### ***Scripture Evidences of the Ruin of the Church on Earth***

(by J. N. Darby)

Let us now prove by direct evidence, that this dispensation, at its end, will be in a state of ruin and not of restitution. The Lord tells us that, as it was in the days of Noah, and of Lot, so shall it be "when the Son of Man is revealed." There were, however, faithful persons then, whom God knew how to preserve; well does not the author [to whom JND was replying] believe that the world, at the time of Noah and of Lot, was in a fallen, ruined state? Thus shall it be when the Son of man shall be revealed. The state of things then existing was one of ruin, although there were faithful persons. It may be called economy, dispensation, what you please; the force of the truth here is obvious.

As to 2 Timothy 3, I have not quoted it in the thought that it could by itself show the existence of an apostasy; but to show that the word of God always presents to us the picture of the ruin of the state of things established by God -- a ruin which the presence of a few faithful ones cannot prevent -- a ruin which will terminate by the complete apostasy, and the manifestation of the Antichrist, and which will be closed by cutting off. Perilous times shall come: this is all that our brother sees; but in what consists the difficulty of those times? It is this: that men, Christians by profession, are found again in the reprobate condition of the Gentiles, depicted in Romans 1. And it is added that evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse. It is said, that men shall be in this state. Is not that a state of ruin, a fallen condition, when the description of Christendom is that men shall be such as the Gentiles, whom God had given over to a mind void of judgment? Compare Romans 1 and 2 and 2 Timothy 3. In the original the resemblance between them is even more striking. Therefore difficult times are not only spoken of, but the special character of those times is shown. We may add that, when the times are so difficult that there is need of extraordinary warnings, it is evident that it must be a general state -- a state that characterizes the dispensation, and more or less in contrast with that of the first times. Thus what is read in 2 Thessalonians 2 -- the great apostasy -- is not yet consummated. But in the application of this passage to the general destiny of the economy, I assert that it teaches us of the mystery of lawlessness which had commenced working from the time of the apostle, was to continue, and that which restrained being taken away, that the lawless one should be revealed, whom the Lord should destroy by the appearing of His coming; and that, previous to this, the apostasy should take place.

Is not that the ruin of the dispensation, the manifestation of an apostasy, the

principles of which were already at work in the apostle's time, and only waited till that which restrained was taken out of the way, to manifest themselves in the lawless one? The author [to whom JND is replying] says that this does not prove that the dispensation is closed. I do not believe that it is closed, and I have not said so; but it reveals the ruin of the dispensation -- a ruin, the instrument of which was already at work, and which ends in apostasy and in judgment. That is what I said.

In the word of God we see two great mysteries, which develop themselves during the present dispensation: the mystery of Christ, and the mystery of lawlessness. The counsels of God, engaged in the first, have their accomplishment in heaven. The union of the body of Christ with Himself in glory will evidently have its accomplishment there on high. But, by the power of the Holy Spirit, there ought to be on earth during this dispensation the manifestation of the union of the body of Christ. But here the responsibility of man comes in for its share in this manifestation here below, although in the end all will be to the glory of God. Therefore the dispensation may be in a state of ruin, although the counsels of God never fail; on the contrary, our lie will turn to His glory, although He judges righteously.

In this sphere of man's responsibility, Satan can introduce himself the moment that man fails to lean absolutely upon God. We know this by every day's experience.

It is, then, revealed that the mystery of lawlessness will have its course. Here it is not a question of counsels, but of an evil done in time. The question here is of this mystery of lawlessness; the apostasy or falling away is not a mystery. There is no need of a revelation to inform us that a man who denies Jesus Christ is not a Christian; he says it. But in this case, it is an evil that has commenced working in the bosom of Christendom, in relation with Christianity; a mystery of which the lawless one will be the full revelation, as the glory of Christ and of the Church will be the full accomplishment of the mystery of Jesus Christ. The words translated, in most versions, "iniquity," and "wicked one," are the same in the original; save that one indicates the thing, and the other the person. It is "lawlessness" and the "lawless one" preeminently. This mystery of lawlessness commenced working in the apostle's time: later the veil would be removed. The apostasy would be then: and at length the lawless one would come to his end by the appearing of the coming of Christ. Thus is the dispensation to be brought to an end: this is what we have revealed in this passage. Hence, as we see elsewhere, this will be to introduce the glory and reign of Christ, so that all the earth may be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God.

Whatever Christians and theologians may have said on the parable of the tares (Matt. 13), I may be allowed to say that it teaches us quite a different thing from what our dear brother finds there (p. 55). He tells us that 'wherever the Lord shall sow or cause to be sowed the good seed, the enemy will also come to sow tares, and that it will be so till the end.' This is not at all what the parable states, though the thing may be true in itself.

The word gives us a similitude of the kingdom of heaven, to which this dispensation belongs, and of which it forms a part. There is no other sower but the Son of man, and *the work which He has done is marred*, not as to the barn, because He will know how to separate the wheat from the tares, but as to the world, in which the work of this dispensation takes place. We see also that the evil, which introduced itself in the beginning by the carelessness of men, cannot be repaired by men as a whole, and in this world. For this is a dispensation of grace and not of judgment.

The counsels as to the wheat cannot fail -- it will be in the barn. But the work, with respect to this world, has been marred; because men have been entrusted with it, and their carelessness has given occasion to the enemy's work, to which no remedy can be brought, as long as the dispensation subsists. I have not said that this parable proved that the evil was to go on increasing; but I said that the Lord had pronounced this judgment: viz., that the servants *could not remedy this state of things*. Is not this what the parable says? It is never said in the word that the apostasy would choke the wheat, or the faithful. There will be faithful ones under the Antichrist, as we have seen, although it be certain that the apostasy will then exist. As for me, I only dare to say what the word has foretold. I behold an evil, to which the neglect of man has given rise, which has marred the Lord's work, as to its state and as a whole in the world, which the Savior alone can remedy, and which He will remedy in putting an end to this dispensation, this age, by the harvest.

I beseech those who desire to know the thoughts of God, very carefully to compare what I have said with the texts quoted, and to see if all is correct. Our brother passes over Jude, because what I have said is obscure. I will endeavor to make it clearer. I say that the word of God teaches us that the evil which will be the object of the judgment of the Lord Jesus, at His coming, entered into the church from its commencement; that this evil is to continue, and that, notwithstanding all the goodness and patience of God, He will bring it into judgment. I quote Jude in support of this assertion. He teaches us that certain men had already crept into the church who were marked out beforehand for this sentence. Although at that time those persons were not as yet so manifested, he gives them, by the spirit of prophecy, these three characters: the natural hatred of a heart alienated from God, like that of Cain; the teaching of error for reward, as Balaam; and open rebellion like that of Core. In this last stage they perish. He says, it is of those that Enoch prophesied when he said that the Lord would come with His holy myriads to judge those who have spoken against Him, etc. However, there will be faithful ones; but already, even at the time of Jude, the evil, which is to end in open rebellion and which is to be the object of the judgment of Christ at His coming, existed in the church.

Examine the epistle (it is not so long), and see if it does not speak of an evil which has already crept into the church, and which would bring in the judgment of persons who were still hidden, but who, being more fully manifested, would be the object of this judgment. What is the impression produced by the epistle, if it be not

that of a warning to a faithful remnant against a terrible evil which would bring in this judgment -- against an evil which then existed in the bosom of the church, of which the condition of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the fallen angels, presented the fearful but just picture? Was not that a state of ruin and of failure, which was only budding, it is true, at that time, but of which the features and the end were not hidden from the prophetic Spirit in the apostle? If there be obscurity in all this, at least there is in this obscurity a dreadful shadow, a shadow which God has placed there, and which should urge us not to pass over it too easily, especially when so grave a matter is in question as the destiny of the church.

Here I have an important remark to add. This epistle of Jude, which in an especial manner treats of the ruin, as well as that of John, which puts the faithful on their guard against the antichrists, by no means address themselves to a church, but to all who compose the church in general, to the faithful as having a common interest, a common destiny. The same may be said of the second epistle of Peter, which also speaks of the same, although it has a character more in relation to the Christians from among the Jews. . . .

I do not wish to enter into details on the Revelation; but I ask what this book presents to us in its prophetic part, when Laodicea (the last of the churches mentioned) has been spued out of the Lord's mouth, and when John is taken up to heaven? Is it the establishment of the dispensation in blessing, or very positive prophecies of misery and judgment? As for me, I find that the kings of the earth will be gathered together by unclean spirits to make war against the Lamb; that Babylon the great will corrupt the whole earth, till she is judged; and that the clusters of the vine of the earth will be cast into the winepress of the wrath of God, and trodden in the winepress of His anger; finally, that the kings of the earth, persevering in evil, will give their power to the beast, and that, through the judgment of God upon them, they will have one and the same will to do so.

I do not now interpret, I take these things as a whole. Do they not announce, including the vine of the earth, a state of corruption, of apostasy, finally of cutting off, before the beginning of the thousand years of blessing which will come in by the presence of the Lord? I do not think the church has done any good by setting aside such solemn warnings; the more so, because God has attached a special blessing to those who listen to them. If the author of the pamphlet does not himself desire to dwell upon this, let him not be surprised if someone draws the attention of the children of God to such portions of the word. Let him allow me to remind him that, if this book were addressed to the then existing churches, the question, in what was addressed to them, was not of churches, but of ruin, apostasy, and of judgment. This is the future which is presented, when John ascends up to heaven. If there be churches, let them take heed to it.

In 1 John 2:18, we have a very striking example of the way in which the latter times presented themselves to the mind of the apostle, to the spirit of prophecy which God had given him. These times were to be known by the presence of evil, of the Antichrist, and besides by this that, even in the times of the apostles, the signs

were there. "You have heard that Antichrist shall come": it was a subject of which even little children in Christ were informed. "Even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." Finally, the apostle directs the attention of the little children to the coming of the Savior. One may surely admit, that the presence of the Antichrist is a sign of the ruin not of the faithful, but of the dispensation as a whole, and of its approaching cutting off. Is it not also true, that this passage in John confirms the testimony borne to this truth, that the evil which would occasion the cutting off had introduced itself from the very beginning, and would continue until God executed the judgment, which would destroy the lawless one, and that in consequence the dispensation would not be restored?

If the patience of God has endured the evil for a long time, does that imply that the judgment will be less certain for Him with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years, or for the faith that cleaves to His word alone?

I come now to Romans 11. Here the arguments of the author of the pamphlet are rather against the apostle than against me. He says that, in order that the cutting off of the dispensation may take place, the Jews as well as the Gentiles must be found in it. Has he never heard, in the word, of the churches of the Gentiles; of an apostle of the Gentiles; of a reception of the Gentiles as a body, when the Jews had been cut off; of Gentiles upon whom the name of God was to be invoked? . . . It is true that, as to the fundamental principle of the church, there was in it neither Jew nor Gentile, because all were looked upon as risen together with Christ; but as to the earthly dispensation of the church, there was an apostle of the Gentiles and an apostle of the circumcision. There was this distinction -- "To the Jew first, and also to the Greek" and it is of this earthly dispensation that we are speaking.\*<sup>23</sup>

I believe our brother will find that the death of Stephen was the occasion of an important change in this respect; it is that of which we are speaking. The Jews were then guilty, because they had rejected not only the Son of man, but also the witness given by the Spirit to the glory of Jesus.

The apostle here speaks of the branches grafted into the good olive tree instead of those which had been broken off; he speaks of the dispensation of the promises of God. This already is an important principle. He speaks of the Gentiles, as having taken the place of the Jews, in the enjoyment of the dispensation of the promises (see verses 12, 13); because the Jews were broken off from their olive tree dispensationally. It is evident that the faithful amongst them were not broken off from Christ -- very far from it, they enjoyed communion with Him in an infinitely higher way than that which they possessed before; but, as a dispensation, the Jewish branches had been broken off. There are then, besides the union of Christ with the faithful, privileges enjoyed as a dispensation, which may be lost; for the Jews, as a dispensation, had lost them. The apostle tells us, moreover, that the Gentiles had

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23. \* Note to translation. -- The passage does not refer to the mystery of the church at all, but to the tree of promise beginning with Abraham.



been put in the place of the Jews, in this position; it is not I that say so, but the apostle. He tells us also, that in this position they, as the Jews, are responsible, and may be cut off, as the Jews have been, although the remnant enjoyed, subsequent to this cutting off, still higher privileges, as the faithful of the present dispensation will enjoy with the Lord in glory during the reign of a thousand years, although the dispensation in which they were faithful be terminated; that is, though God will have put an end to the present dispensation, in the which He now places Himself in relation with men here below.

In different dispensations, God puts Himself in relation with men, on certain principles; He judges them according to those principles. If those who are found in this outward relationship are unfaithful to the principles of the dispensation, although God may long forbear, He puts an end to it, while at the same time preserving the faithful for Himself; this is what He has done as to the Jewish dispensation. Well! this chapter informs us that the Gentiles have been grafted into the place of the Jews. Mark, that in making this statement, I do not argue concerning what ought to be, but I quote the revelation of God contained in this chapter. The Holy Ghost speaks to Gentiles, He places them under their responsibility, and threatens them with the same fate as Israel.

Let us examine more closely this chapter. First, the apostle distinguishes between the counsels of God, and the enjoyment of privileges attached to the dispensation. As to the counsels of God, the Jews, as a nation, were to enjoy promises, which had been made to them in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, notwithstanding all that might happen, for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." It is moreover what will happen in another dispensation in the world\*<sup>24</sup> to come. In the present dispensation,<sup>25</sup> what is presented to us is one body, gathered together from all nations, for heaven. But as to the dispensation of God, the Jews were to be cut off, until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in; and the setting aside of the dispensation was not to prevent a remnant being spared and saved: this is what the apostle set forth in the beginning of the chapter. . . .<sup>26</sup>

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24. \* The expression "world to come" is not applicable to heaven. [The world to come is the age to come, i. e., the millennium.]

25. Note to translation. -- Strictly this is not a dispensation at all, but a heavenly calling, introduced, at the close of the Jewish, before the world or age to come in which the promises made to them will be fulfilled.

26. *Collected Writings* 1:173-181.

## Chapter 1.4

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### ***How to Understand the Implications of the Ruin of the Church on Earth***

[A letter by J. N. Darby -- to which I have added the boldfaced titles.]

#### **THE RUIN IS NOT THE APOSTASY <sup>27</sup>**

You ask for a few words upon the apostasy. I do not hold to the word apostasy. It expresses the open renunciation of Christianity rather than the abandonment of its principles by those who have made a profession of it. But the thing, as to the reality of it, is of all-importance for heart and conscience. So long as the word was applied only to the votaries of Romanism, one would have had no difficulty about using it; but when it is understood that if this falling away of Christendom has come, the effect of it has been universal, one is shocked by the use of the word.

The *open* apostasy, then, has not yet come; but the giving up of the authority and efficacy of the word, and of faith in the presence of the Holy Ghost, the substituting the authority of the clergy for the immediate rights of the Lord over the conscience, the denial of justification by faith, and the putting the efficacy of the sacraments in the place of the work of the Holy Spirit -- in a word, the full development of "the mystery of iniquity" -- shows us an abandonment of the first condition of the church, and of the principles upon which it was founded, which is a moral apostasy. As John says, "You have heard that antichrist shall come: even now there are many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." Thus the apostasy, in the sense of a public giving up of Christianity, has not come; but the spirit of the apostasy manifests itself, not only in the development of the mystery of iniquity, but in the giving up of Christianity and of the authority of the word, and of Christ Himself, which characterizes half the population of Western Europe -- Rationalism, as it is called, and the spirit of rebellion which accompanies it. The thoughts of man have taken the place of the word of God; they will no longer have its authority: the will of man will no longer have the authority of Christ. If the antichrist is not there, antichrists have been there long since; if the apostasy is not there, the spirit of apostasy has long since taken hold upon the mind of men.

#### **THE JUDGMENT OF A SYSTEM THAT GOD HAD ESTABLISHED**

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27. [See *Collected Writings* 1:254-256 for more on the subject of failure and cutting off.]

But I said it was a serious matter. If the assembly -- for the word "church" is very misleading, since we ask ourselves what the church is -- if the assembly of God has not kept its first estate, if it has said, "My Lord delayeth his coming," and has begun to beat the servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken -- and it has done this for a long time, for centuries -- it will be cut in sunder and have its portion with the hypocrites. It is said that Christ built His assembly upon the rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. This I believe, thank God, with all my heart. But this has nothing to do with the question. That which Christ built, indeed, will not be overthrown by the enemy; surely not. It is a question of what man has built, in that case it is not so. "I," says Paul, "as a wise master-builder, have laid the foundation . . . but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." There it is the responsibility of man, which in some sort -- in a certain sense altogether -- enters into the question of the building. It is indeed the building of God, the apostle says, but it is built under the responsibility of man: a present thing upon the earth. It is not a question here of the salvation of individuals, but of the condition of the system in which those individuals are. When the end of Judaism under the first covenant came, pious souls -- believers -- were transferred to the church. God made an end of the dispensation for ever. At the close of the christian dispensation the faithful will be taken to heaven, and judgment will put an end to the system in which they were previously. Nothing is more simple. The old world perished; Noah and his family were saved. The judgment of a system does not touch God's faithfulness, if it does not prove it by making apparent that He keeps His own even when all around them sink under the weight of His judgment. But what can be more solemn than the judgment of that which God established on the earth, that which had been dear to Him? If Jesus could weep over Jerusalem, how deeply ought His people to feel the thought of the coming judgment of that which had a value far more precious than even Jerusalem. It is thus that Jeremiah, the vessel of the lamentations of the Spirit of God under the old economy, in words of rare and touching beauty, shows his deep grief in view of the ruin of that which belonged to God: "The Lord has violently taken away *his* tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he has destroyed his places of the assembly. . . . The Lord has cast off *his* altar, he has abhorred *his* sanctuary" (Lam. 2:6, 7). This is the spirit in which the faithful one ought to think of the ruin of that which names the name of Christ.

## WILL GOD JUDGE CHRISTENDOM?

But you will say: "Yes, certainly; when it was a question of Judaism, that is plain; but it could not happen to Christianity." In the first place, that is just what the unbelieving Jews in the days of Jeremiah said: "The law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet." False confidence this, which brought destruction upon the people and upon the holy city. But there is more than this; it is precisely against this very false confidence that Paul (Rom. 11) solemnly warns Christians from among the Gentiles, that is to say, as drawing a parallel between the Jews and Christendom. "Behold then the goodness and severity of God: upon them who have fallen, severity; upon thee, goodness, *if thou continue in his goodness*; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." That is to say, the Christian system among

the Gentiles is subject to the same judgment as the Jewish system. If the Gentiles, who stand only by faith, do not continue in the goodness of God, they will suffer a like fate with the Jews. Is Romanism the "continuing in the goodness of God"? Are "perilous times" the result of "continuing in the goodness of God"; or is it the "form of godliness, denying the power of it" from which the Christian must "turn away" (2 Tim. 3)? If the apostle could say, "All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ" -- is that "continuing in the goodness of God"? If the apostle foresaw that after his departure, evil would immediately intrude itself, the strong hand of the apostle being no longer there to keep the door shut against the adversary; if Jude was compelled to say that those who were the subjects of judgment had already crept into the church; if John had said they had left the Christians, had *gone out* from them--a step beyond that of which Jude speaks -- that there were many antichrists, and that by this they might know that it was the last times; if Peter announces to us that "the time was come that judgment should begin at the house of God" -- does all this lead us to believe that the Gentiles have continued in the goodness of God, or that the Christian system established among the Gentiles would be terminated by judgment, the terrible judgment of God; that as to outward profession it is a question of drinking of the cup of His unmingled wrath, or of being spued out of His mouth as nauseous because of its lukewarmness? This is what is so solemn for our consciences. Shall we, as a system, come under God's judgment? The faithful will assuredly enjoy a far more excellent portion, a heavenly glory, but the christian system, as a system on the earth, will be cut off for ever.

With regard to the passages quoted from Mons. Bost, what he says is entirely false. The scriptures speak of the assembly the habitation of God down here. The whole question lies here. In a house, the question is not of union but of dwelling. With regard to the body of Christ, it could not have dead members. We may deceive men, but in very truth he who is united to the Head is one Spirit. The body is formed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12). Then, Christ builds a house which will not be complete till the last stone shall have been placed in it; it grows to be a holy temple in the Lord. But we have seen that down here the building being committed to men, it may be that the house is badly built, and will draw down the judgment of God upon what has been done. That the church has been placed as the pillar and ground of the truth, and that she is still responsible to keep that place, is quite another thing from saying that she has kept it.

## CHRISTENDOM HAS BECOME LIKE A GREAT HOUSE

Now the first Epistle to Timothy depicts for us the order of the house of God, and how man should behave himself in the house of God. Has he then behaved thus? -- this is the question. If he has done so, whence then the papacy? The second epistle Timothy directs the conduct of the faithful when confusion has come in. Already christian things were no longer in the condition in which they had been formerly. At the beginning, the Lord added to the assembly daily such as should be saved. They were manifested, and were added in the sight of the world to a well-known body. Now when the apostle writes his second Epistle to Timothy, this was already changed. All he can say is, "the Lord knows them

that are his": they might indeed be hidden from man, as the seven thousand were from Elijah. But along with this, there is a rule for the faithful one, "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." Then comes the thought of the great house. We must expect to find in a great house vessels to dishonor well as vessels to honor, but again there is a rule for the faithful one. He must purify himself from the vessels to dishonor, and not only so, he must "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call on the Lord *out of a pure heart*." In this state of disorder I cannot know, as at the beginning, all those who belong to God; but as to my own walk, I am to associate with those who have a pure heart. Further, in chapter 3, the apostle teaches us that in the last days perilous times shall come, when, under the form of godliness, its power shall be denied. This is not avowed apostasy, there is a form of godliness; but it is real moral apostasy -- the power of it is denied. M. Bost says, I ought to remain in and be content with it; the apostle bids me "from such turn away" -- whom shall I obey?

## **CAN WE DISTINGUISH THE FAITHFUL AMIDST THE RUIN?**

When he tells me that "it is impossible to distinguish those who are truly faithful from those who make an outward profession," and the apostle says, Let him who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity, and tells me that I must purify myself from the vessels to dishonor and follow after christian graces with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart -- how can I listen to one who tells me that it is not possible to distinguish? If he tells me that there may be many souls, known by the Lord, whom I do not recognize; I reply, undoubtedly: the Lord knows those that are His. But I have directions for my conduct in this state of things which contradict yours. I am to recognize and associate myself with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart; consequently to distinguish them. I am to purify myself from the vessels to dishonor; consequently to distinguish them. I am to turn away from those who have the form of godliness, but deny the power of it; I must then clearly recognize those who are such.

Further, it is a frightful principle to say that we cannot distinguish between the children of God and the people of the world -- besides it is not true -- a frightful principle, for it is said, "By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another": now, if I cannot discern them, I cannot love them, and the testimony which God would have is lost. In the next place, it is not true practically, for we enjoy brotherly fellowship, and every faithful Christian makes a difference between a child of God and one who is not. There are some that we do not discern and that God knows: this is not denied. But in this respect the passages which I have quoted from 2 Timothy guide us. What would become of family affection if a father were to say to his children, You cannot tell who are your brothers and who are not; you must associate with everybody, without any distinction whatever?

## **THE CHURCH IS NOT WHAT IT WAS AT THE BEGINNING**

I do not look into dictionaries, as they tell us to do, but into the hearts and consciences of those who love the Lord, taking the word of God that I may see

what was the state of the church at the beginning, and what it is now; and what that word says to inform us as to what the church would become in the last times. The word is as clear as can be as to the decline of the church, and the character of the last times, and as to the setting aside of the christian system. The word is clear enough as to the unity which should subsist as a testimony borne to the world, that it might believe (John 17). If a letter were addressed by the apostle to the church of God which is at Turin, who would obtain the letter at the Post Office except those of the Roman system? The church, as it was at the beginning, no longer exists. Call it what you will, provided that the heart feels that you have at heart the glory of the Lord trodden under foot by men. If the present state of the church is not the great beast which is spoken of, the indifference of conscience which can say so, and cavil as to the use of the word, is the most obvious proof of that lukewarmness which in the end causes Christ to spew the church out of His mouth.

### **THE RUIN OF THE CHURCH IS IN KEEPING WITH THE HISTORY OF MAN'S FAILURE <sup>28</sup>**

Besides, there is nothing in this failure of the assembly but what is in keeping with the history of man from the beginning. As soon as man was left to himself, he fell, and, unfaithful in his ways, has fallen from his first estate, to which he has never returned. God does not restore it, but He gives salvation by redemption and introduces man into an infinitely more glorious condition in the second Man Jesus Christ. When Noah was saved in the destruction of the whole world, the first thing that we read after his sacrifice is that he gets drunk. When the law was given, before Moses had come down from the mount, Israel had made the golden calf. The first day after the consecration of Aaron, his sons offered strange fire, and entrance into the holy of holies was forbidden to Aaron except on the day of atonement: he never wore his robes of glory and beauty there. David's chief son, Solomon, a type of the Lord, fell into idolatry, and the kingdom immediately fell. God's patience was gloriously displayed in all these cases, but the system which God had established was set aside as a system connected with Him -- less obviously in the case of Noah, because a formal relationship did not exist in the same way. But the confusion of Babel put an end to the order of the world, and tyranny and wars came in. But with regard to man -- Israel, the priesthood, the kingdom -- whatever God's patience may have been, man fell at once, and the system was never restored on the old footing. It is not surprising if this is found again in the history of the church, in as far as it is placed under the responsibility of man. It has said, "My Lord delayeth his coming," and has begun to beat the menservants and the maidservants and to join itself to the world. It will be cut off.

### **CONFOUNDING PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY**

The grand principle of Romanism, and of other systems which are more or less like it, and which makes them essentially false, is that they attribute to Christendom -- the assembly organized by means of ordinances -- the stability

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28. [Among other references, see also *Collected Writings* 11:279, 280, and 14:87.]

and the unfailing privileges which belong only to that which Christ has built, to that which is the work of the Holy Spirit. All kinds of false doctrines are the result of this error; one is born of God, a member of the body of Christ -- then one perishes: one is pardoned -- and lost. That is what the article in the *Vedetta Cristiana* comes to, what the passage quoted by M. Bost involves. He forgets one of the two principal characteristics of the church according to the word, precisely the one where the responsibility of man comes in; that is, of being the habitation of God on the earth. He shows us the title that Ephesians 1 gives us, and overlooks that of Ephesians 2; then he shows us the condition in which the church now is, not surely composed of true members of Christ, without accounting for it, and without giving any information about the matter that might enable us to know whether it is good or bad -- whence it comes, where it will end, or how the word judges of this state of things. The expressions which he uses are equivalent to those of the unbelieving Jews in Jeremiah's time -- "We are delivered to do all these abominations."

### THE CHURCH IS CORRUPTED

No one can say that the state of the church of Christendom is at all, in any respect, such as we find it in the word. At the beginning there was no Romanism, no National Church, no Dissenters. There was the church of God, and nothing else; which, it will be said, became very quickly corrupted. Be it so. Has it taken place? But there was a church to corrupt, an assembly into which some men had slipped. Was this corruption a good thing, or does it not bring judgment? Has it not made frightful progress since? Has the church of God been reestablished on earth? Ought I to mourn over it? Should I not search in the word to see what its end will be, and pay attention to this? We have quoted this word, let each one judge before God what it says. If we are in grievous times, has not the word given us principles by which we may trace the way in which we ought to walk? If any one has the conviction that we are in those sad times of which he reads in 2 Timothy 2, 3, and will be before God, who has given us those principles, in full confidence in Christ, the result as to his conviction will not be doubtful. May he know how to walk with God! Let us remember that in every position in which the first Adam failed, man has been gloriously restored in the Second. But this is a subject, interesting as it is, upon which I cannot enter here.<sup>29</sup>

See the article, "What is the Church, as it was at the Beginning? and What is its Present State?" *Collected Writings* 14:77-90.

### ***Those Who Understand the Ruin Are a Weeping People***

I have no hope, sir, that the sense of the misery of the Church generally will be awakened in the hearts of those who participate in your views, nor of seeing them afflicted with the affliction of the people of God. Though God can work everything in individuals, He employs two means in His word for leading us to judge rightly of the condition of His people: the comparison of this condition

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29. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:94-101.

with that in which He placed them at the first (Isaiah 5), and then the question, how far this people are in a condition to present themselves before God at the time of the manifestation of His glory (Isaiah 6). People set to work to make churches and elders, because they do not trouble themselves about either the one or the other. To weep over Jerusalem, however certain the safety of the elect might be, was the portion of the heart of Christ. Those who are at ease in Zion, to use an expression of the Old Testament, will always scorn the grief of such as feel how far the holy city has departed from her God. After the first manifestation of the power of God in the establishment of His people, at various epochs, those who were led by the Spirit of God were always a weeping people: not from distrust of the faithfulness of God Himself, but overwhelmed by the feeling that is produced by the consciousness of the little response on the part of the faithful to the power and grace of God. Struck with the beauty of His people, seen (as Balaam saw them) with the eyes of God, they walk mournfully at the sight of their practical condition. A prophet joyful, excepting in the hope of the coming of the Lord, or in the Lord Himself, is not found in the word. I do not touch longer, therefore, on this point; I leave to God, always good, to act in hearts, according to His sovereign grace, to lead them to see the Church and its present condition as He sees them, and to cause them to feel in this respect as His Spirit makes one feel.<sup>30</sup>

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30. *Collected Writings* 4:345





## ***Chapter 1.5***

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### ***Ruin and Forms***

(Extract from Jeremiah . . . , by W. Kelly)

When a dispensation is diverted from its proper character because the people of God are unfaithful to their responsibility, it is no longer a question with them of maintaining its outward forms in their original integrity, because they are invalidated in practice by this departure from the truth. And with the faithful, it is a question of falling back not upon something new but upon whatever is harmonious with the confession of the ruined state.

We must always be in the truth of a state of things, as before God. For instance, if I am a sinner I cannot be blessed unless I take the place of a sinner; and, in like manner, if the outward dispensation is ruined I cannot be fully blessed unless I recognize and feel the ruin. If I think that everything is prosperous when God is preparing to judge, it is plain that I am out of communion with Him, perhaps not as regards my own soul but as regards the general state of things.

The moral difference involved is that when things are all right and smooth at the beginning of a dispensation the duty of a man is faithfully to throw himself into everything when everything is good; but when things are corrupted it is his duty to separate himself from what is corrupt and only to continue with what bears the stamp of the Spirit of God upon it. That is the difference. You will find that in every dispensation outward forms always fall into the hands of deceivers, because an outward form is easily copied and easily maintained. Hence the priests and the false prophets were the persons in Judah and Jerusalem that kept up the name of zealotry for the law, and on this ground they claimed the allegiance of the people.

These are the persons against whom the faithful are warned by Jeremiah and the prophets. So, in the same way, there is no doubt at all that supposing Christendom is to continue uninterruptedly as a religious system the people that have the greatest claims are the Papists, and therefore if Christendom is indefectible we ought all to be Papists. But it is plain that the conscience and spirituality of every believer revolt against such an appalling thought. We all feel that it is impossible that the God of truth and grace should bind us to worship the Virgin Mary or the saints and angels and so on.

We feel that the Papists are idolaters, and we are quite right. They are idolaters, and they are worse idolaters than pagan idolaters, for if it is a bad thing to worship Jupiter and Saturn it is a far worse thing to worship the Virgin Mary. I cannot take knowledge of the Virgin Mary unless I know that she is the mother of the Lord, and knowledge of the Virgin Mary supposes the knowledge of Mary. Therefore I have the knowledge which ought to guard me against worshipping the Virgin. The very fact of knowing that the Virgin Mary was the

mother of Christ ought to preserve me from Mariolatry. Therefore, I think that, of all idolatries that have ever been under the sun, the idolatry of the Church of Rome is the vilest.

It may be asked whether the ruin of the church is generally known and considered. It is not, because a great many of God's children have never fairly faced the matter. They think when they hear of the ruin of the church, or of Christendom, that it means somehow that God has not been faithful to His promises, whereas it is no question at all of fidelity to promises. Fidelity to promises goes with faith not with forms; but so far from despising forms the reason why I never could stand the kind of thing that is common in Christendom now was that I would not give up the forms of God's word.

For instance, take a congregation choosing a minister. Well, I never could be a Dissenter for that reason, because that is the invariable plan. I know there are many Dissenters who think the same thing; Isaac Taylor who wrote *The Natural History of Enthusiasm* and other books was one. He was a congregational deacon, and he wrote a book on this subject.

Scripture provides for the choice of a person to distribute funds. You ought to have confidence in the person who distributes funds or you will shut up your purse, but there is no such idea in God's word as choosing a man to preach. All the great denominations do so; not merely Dissenters, but all sorts of sects.

The whole scheme is out of course. It is wrong in principle. The principle is that he chooses who gives. I give the money and I am allowed to choose a person to be the distributor of it, but I do not give the Holy Spirit to the church, and therefore I must not choose the minister. If God supplies gifts without asking me I am not acting in a proper and becoming way as a Christian in choosing them among my spiritual brothers and sisters.

I own every spiritual person as a brother and sister, and desire grace to behave as such myself. This is perfectly plain, but, of course, just as the relationship of spiritual brothers and sisters is all settled by God's grace and God's will, so much more the appointment of persons to rule or teach or preach. We are not competent to choose. No one is competent. There never was a pretension even on the part of the apostles to do that. The apostles did appoint elders, but it is a mistake to suppose that elders are the same as gifts in the church. There were a great many elders who were not gifts. An elder you cannot have now, for an elder is a direct appointment from the Lord.

I mention this to show that for my own part I am a decided stickler for apostolic forms, and I do not therefore at all hold that one can set up new forms according to his own will. One of the reasons that makes me feel the present ruined state of Christendom is that not only is there unbelief in the authority of the word but there is also an unlawful exercise and assumption of authority without the Lord's having warranted it.

The exercise of man's will in such matters has the deepest possible moral influence on the Christian profession. If you have not the authority of the Lord, you have man's will. I consider that man's will in the things of God is nothing but sin. The whole business of the church and of the Christian is to do the will of God upon the earth. Indeed, there is no reason for us to be on the earth

except simply to be the servants of God, and thus we are called to do His will all our life from the time that we are redeemed by blood of Christ. We are not, therefore, allowed by God to do one single thing out of our own heads. I am persuaded that in himself man is incompetent to act aright, and that we need to be guided by the word and by the power of the Spirit of God continually.

Now where the human will is allowed, every evil thing may be the result. When once you bring in the principle of man's will in any one single thing -- take, for instance, the choice of a minister by a congregation -- you may by the same system vote a cardinal or you may vote a pope. It all rests on the same false principle.

There is, however, ample authority for the present day. There is the standard, and the only one -- the word of God. I go upon the assurance that God foresaw the end from the beginning and also every want of the Christian and of the church upon the earth, and that He provided in His word not only for what was then wanted but for all that would be wanted until the Lord comes to receive us up into glory. Then, having confidence in the word of God our first business is to find out what the will of God really is. I discover what His will was when things were right, then I find the direction that He gives when things are wrong. I learn what is the right state of things in what I call the wrong state of the church.

I know that it is thought by some that God has left the mode in which the church is to be governed an open question and that they can change the procedure according to the country or the circumstances. I deny this policy as a first principle, and I say it is false, and not only false, but that it results in the most serious consequences, because the result of it is that I am not divinely guided but I am humanly guided.

I thoroughly hold ministry to be a divine institution, and I do not believe that the ruined state of the church touches ministry in the smallest degree. There are persons over us in the Lord, but the moment you touch the source of ministry, that moment you separate ministry from the principles of the word of God. Now I believe that both the church and ministry are divine institutions, but in order to preserve their divine character they must be regulated by the word of God and not by men's new inventions and shifting ideas.

I contend for the highest antiquity: Irenaeus and Justin Martyr are too low for me; that is, they are too modern. To me, everything is modern except the apostles; that is, I hold that genuine antiquity is what is divinely revealed. So far from thinking that the church of God is a thing according to men or a thing to be shifted with new fashions, I hold for the true, remote, and only divine antiquity. I believe that is what we all ought to do, but then that is a matter for each one to learn from God. I would not force any brother on such a point. The term, "the ruin of Christendom," grates on many ears. Perhaps the Lord means it to grate. It is well to pull persons up when they are wrong.<sup>1</sup>

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1. W. Kelly, *Jeremiah: The Tender-Hearted Prophet of the Nations*, Hammond: London, pp. 26-31 (1938).



***Part 2:***  
***Eldership***



## *Chapter 2.1*

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### *Apostolic Power Required for the Appointment of Elders*

It is a fact that J. N. Darby taught, with scripture proof of the fact, that the church is in ruins, as we saw in part one. In apostolic days, there were assemblies that had elders appointed by the apostle Paul or by his delegates who thus carried with them his authority to appoint elders as he ordered (Titus 1:5). Eldership is a local office, not a gift; though some elders had a gift of public ministry of the word, but others did not. Eldership was for taking the lead among the saints. Without the apostle Paul or his delegates, authority to ordain elders disappeared (though man pretended to carry on, imitating authority not theirs. God saw fit to allow that authority to lapse. The ruin had already occurred when Paul was still here. It pleased God, in view of the ruin, that there should be no such outward power as there was at the beginning; spite of the sham of subsequent, historic and present imitations, whether of Montanists, Jansenists, Camisards, Shakers, etc., in the past, and Irvingites last century, or Pentecostals and Charismatics now. What would it be to have in the midst of Christendom (where?) official elders?

There are two requirements for a man to be called an elder:

- he is a person having the moral qualifications found in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1;
- plus, he needed to be installed into the office by the apostle or his delegate sent to do it.

We are left now with that which is moral in character, for that which is morally and spiritually pleasing to God cannot be ruined. The external power and ornaments of the once fair church are gone, irrecoverably so. And though there are no longer officially appointed elders, there yet may be men who show forth the moral features and fitness described in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1. And so God has provided such for taking the lead, care and guidance among His own, without the pretension of authority to imitate the apostle or his duly appointed delegates. It is placed as a responsibility on saints to recognize such, and submit to them. Some scriptures helpful in guiding us in this regard are: Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 16:16, 17; Col. 4:12, 13, 17; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24. The following articles will speak of these things merely outlined here.

There is a distinction between gift and office. A pastor, teacher, evangelist, or prophet is a gift. They are gifts wherever they go. Eldership is a local office; *i.e.*, it is an office in one assembly. The elders at Phillipi were not elders at Ephesus, but if a pastor visited from Phillipi to Ephesus, he was a gifted pastor there as well as anywhere he went. Not so an elder. Sometimes eldership has been called, and rightly so, "a local charge."



Concerning offices, there are in scripture only two: elders and deacons. In scripture, as we shall see in the following articles, an elder and a bishop are the same thing (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1, 8), one term referring to the person, the other to his work. Sometimes a bishop is called an elder and sometimes an overseer (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:1, 17; 5:17). You will have noticed in reading these scriptures that bishops/elders/overseers were usually in a plurality in an assembly. There is no idea in scripture of a bishop of a diocese (a collection of towns); cp. Titus 1:5. Overseers were to "take care of the assembly of God" (1 Tim. 3:5). The merger of ministry of the word and doctrine with eldership has given rise to the clerical system. The two are distinct in scripture and there were elders who did not labor in the word and doctrine:

Let the elders who take the lead [among the saints] well be esteemed worthy of double honor, specially those laboring in word and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17).

No doubt gifts (charismata) which were "sign-gifts" (cp. 1 Cor. 14:22), such as the gifts of tongues, healings and miracles have ceased (cp. 1 Cor. 13:8); and we no longer have apostles. Prophets, as speaking by revelation, are no longer with us, though as forth-telling the mind of God they are with us (as is the gift of knowledge) until that which is perfect is come (1 Cor. 13:8 -- see J. N. Darby's trans.), i.e., when the perfection of glory comes, at the coming of the Lord for us. There are clergy who strive mightily to make this mean when the canon of the N. T. was completed, thus getting rid of the prophets speaking according to the directions of 1 Cor. 14, consequently opening the door for the clergy's place. Accordingly, pastoring, evangelizing and teaching is merged with eldership, producing the clergy.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, pretension to the power of ordination must be kept up for all, so that the system may pretend to appear as if it is all scriptural. Those who have learned that this is all trampling upon the prerogatives of the Spirit of God, as well as apostolic order, along with a right view of what the church is, as well as its ruined state, are labeled disorderly. Note well, that such who affirm that the non- sign-gifts (non- sign- charismata) have ceased, while at the same time they attempt to perpetuate the power of the apostle or his delegate to ordain elders. Here we have a great reversal.<sup>3</sup> There are gifts which are manifestations of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7) that continue on until the Lord comes for us, which they deny, while official eldership no longer exists, yet they affirm that it does! Thus, the continuing gifts are denied while at the same time, interconnectedly, it is pretended that the authority to ordain elders continues. Thus is the matter inverted. On the other hand there is the evil of the present day Pentecostal/charismatic pretension that virtually all the gifts are present. This also, necessarily, denies the ruined state of the church.

The following articles were selected to bring out various aspects of the subject of eldership, and there will be some overlap, perhaps not without merit in view of how badly the subject is misunderstood and abused. Some repetition may be beneficial for many readers seeking help on this subject. Let us turn, then, first of all, to consider the Lord Jesus as the Bishop of our souls.

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2. See *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:32, 332; 31:305-306.

3. See also *The Bible Treasury* 10:189; 14:286.





## ***Chapter 2.2***

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### ***The Present Service of the Lord Jesus Christ***

#### ***Bishop of our Souls***

"Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). In two characters does the Apostle here present to us the Lord Jesus Christ, which, though closely connected, are yet to be distinguished. . . .

Bishops, or overseers, ἐπίσκοποι, is a term with which all readers of the New Testament are familiar, and one with which the students of the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament were not unacquainted. For in matters as well civil (Isaiah 50:17, Neh. 9:9, 14, 22) as military (Num. 31:14; 2 Kings 11:15 [4 Kings LXX.]), and in such as concerned the oversight of priestly service (Num. 4:16), we meet in that translation with those called overseers or bishops. But while in the Septuagint the term is applied to overseers of various services, in the New Testament it is, with one exception, used only of those men who had the oversight of such as professedly belonged to the assembly of God's saints. That one exception we meet with in 1 Peter, who applies the word bishop in a manner not elsewhere met with in the sacred volume, when he writes of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory as the Bishop of our souls. Bishops there were upon earth, witness those at Philippi in Europe, and at Ephesus in Asia (Phil. 1:1; Acts 20:28); for the Greek word, translated "overseers" in the latter passage, is that elsewhere translated bishop. Provision, too, was made for their appointment by Titus [who was an apostolic delegate] in the different cities in Crete (Titus 1:5-7). Peter, however, writes of one different from all these; inasmuch as he received not His appointment from men, and can have no successor in His office, and who therefore stands out as alone in His work, when described in the Word as the Bishop of our souls.

But what are we to understand by this term? and wherein does it differ from that of shepherd? All bishops shepherded the flock, but every pastor or shepherd was not a bishop [elder, or overseer]. For a shepherd or pastor [a gift] proper is a term of wider import than that of a bishop. The latter was concerned with God's saints in the local assemblies, with which in God's providence he was connected. The former [the pastor] found his work wherever he met with a single sheep of the flock of God [there is only one flock]. A shepherd intimates very close relations between the sheep and himself. With all their interests he is concerned; he feeds them, he leads them, he tends them. They confide in him, and receive from him. A bishop, on the other hand, found his special sphere of service in taking care of the assembly of God, and in preventing, by vigilance and timely counsel, being taught in the word, the

introduction of disorder or false teaching into the flock. A shepherd suggests to mind one who has a heart for those entrusted to his care. A bishop brings before us the thought of one able to rule in the assembly.

Bishops, then, in the New Testament, had confided to them the care of the local assembly (1 Tim. 3:5). To take the lead therein was their special duty, though some of them labored in the word and doctrine as well (1 Tim. 5:17). All elders or bishops, for though the words are different the office was the same (Titus 1:5-7), were to take time lead ποιοῦν, though all did not labor in the word and doctrine; for teachers are gifts from the ascended Christ (Eph. 4:8-11), whereas bishops were set in their places by the Holy Ghost (Acts 20:28), through the instrumentality of apostles (Acts 14:23) or their delegates (Titus 1:5). Sound in the faith such officers were to be, able, as St. Paul wrote to Titus (1:9), to exhort with sound doctrine, as well as to convince, or confute, the gainsayers. Conversant, then, they must have been with the truth, possessing, among other qualities enumerated, that of aptness to teach (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1), the opportunity for which, in the faithful discharge of their duties, would surely arise, if encouragement was needed, or gainsayers had to be refuted.

As their sphere was the local assembly (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23), [namely] the flock of God, which was among them (1 Peter 5:2), we understand why the apostles, Paul and Barnabas, did not choose elders on their first missionary journey, till assemblies had been formed. An assembly must be in existence before bishops would be requisite. Gifts from the ascended Christ, evangelists, etc., must have labored in the locality before an assembly could be formed; and, till it had been, episcopal service [oversight] with reference to it could clearly have had no place but, when formed, that class of service, whether done by those officially appointed [by the apostle or his delegates], or taken up by such as were qualified and willing for the work (1 Cor. 16:15, 16; 1 Thess. 5:12) <sup>4</sup> was much needed, and to be highly prized. We see, too, as we understand their special line of service, why Paul summoned the elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, instead of convoking a conference of the teachers and pastors from that city, for he wished to warn them, as those to whom had been entrusted by the Holy Ghost the care of that assembly, of the dangers that would beset them from the incursion of grievous wolves, not sparing the flock, as well as from the rising up from amongst themselves of men speaking perverse (or rather perverted) things. On account of this they were to watch. Teachers might show what was wrong, and instruct the faithful in what was right, but the elders could act with authority in the discharge of their duty of watching over the assembly, and in this manner shepherding the flock, as both Paul and Peter enjoined on them (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2, *Greek*).

Tracing out from the word what the work and sphere of a bishop was, we can understand the class of service to which Peter refers when he writes of the Lord as Bishop of our souls. Bishop, he calls Him. For though the terms, elders and bishops, designate the same people in the church of God, elder was the title of respect borne by the individual, whilst bishop was descriptive of his work.

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4. [Such persons, not being appointed by the Apostle or his delegates, were not elders in the full sense of the word.]

Elders of the assembly, or church, such people were called; never bishops of the assembly, though, as elders, such officials took the oversight of, or, to coin a word, *bishoped* the flock. In accordance with this, Paul, writing to Titus, reminds him that he was left in Crete to establish elders in every city, but, as soon as he touches on the qualifications needed by the individuals, and the duties of their office, he gives them the title of bishops. Again, when writing to Timothy about the proper treatment of such laborers, he makes mention of them by the name of elders -- their title of respect (1 Tim. 5:17-19); but when describing the class of people fitted for the work, he styles them bishop, and their work episcopal service [overship] (1 Tim. 3:1, 2). The same difference of terms are met with in that chapter of the Acts already referred to. Paul summoned the elders of Ephesus, but reminds them that they were bishops in, not over, the flock. The terms are not convertible, though both can be used of one and the same individual. As an elder, we think of the man; as bishop, we are reminded of his work.

The character of service, then, carried on by the Lord, to which the apostle makes reference, we can understand, as we observe the use of the term bishop. And may not the order in which the Shepherd and Bishop are mentioned by the inspired writer be worthy of notice? For, as a pastor would find opportunities for the exercise of his gift before a bishop would have a sphere in which to work, so the Lord, as the Shepherd, has to do with the sheep before His episcopal [oversight] care could be called into exercise. The sound doctrine must first be known, before it can be applied to encourage or confute. But, besides noticing the order, we should mark likewise the phraseology employed. Bishop of our souls, he calls the Lord. Not merely bishop, not bishop in the flock, for such they were upon earth, appointed by the Holy Ghost; but he calls Him, Bishop of our souls, as the One who, in His grace, manifests episcopal care for each of His people individually. And, what it must be to Him to see His people walking in an orderly manner, we can in some feeble measure understand from the sentiments expressed by Paul to the Colossians (2:5), and by John to the elect lady (1 John 4), and to his well-beloved Gaius (3 John 3, 4). For both apostles had drunk deep of the Spirit of Christ.

Bishop of our souls the Lord is, and as such takes the oversight of His people individually. For though He has sat down on high, having accomplished the work given Him to do in making atonement on the cross, He is occupied with His own in their orderly walk whilst on earth. The words of Peter make this clear; the term Bishop used by him being explicit, and those to whom the apostle thus wrote must have understood it. He is the Bishop of our souls, whatever believers may think about it, or are conscious, or not, of His personal service to them in that capacity.

But have we, it may be asked, any illustration in the New Testament of such care for His people? Was it not acting somewhat in that capacity that the Lord presented Himself to the angels of the Seven Churches in Asia? As Son of Man, John saw Him in the vision about to deal judicially with the Churches, as by and by He will with the world. But does He not also appear in these seven addresses in the character of One, who, fully cognizant of the state of each assembly, desires the real welfare of every individual that would hearken to what the Spirit saith unto the Churches? Evangelistic labors had professedly

gathered out these souls from the midst of the abominations of heathendom, as well as from that moral condition of things called in Scripture the world (1 John 2:15, 16). Pastors, too, doubtless, they had possessed, and teachers likewise, who had ministered to their spiritual wants, and had instructed them in the truth. The assemblies having been first formed, then it was the Lord came forward, and manifested by these epistles, that though, as Son of Man, He must deal with what is wrong, if not corrected, yet He was in their midst, as one who not only surveyed all, but sought by His admonitions to get the wrong put right, and by encouraging words to sustain the faithful in their path. No new truth is brought out, no fresh revelations are vouchsafed beyond the announcement, by promises of what He would give to the faithful, and by warnings as to the way He must deal with the impenitent. Of all the truth that they wanted, [needed in order] to deal with anything that was wrong, the assemblies were already in possession, as we learn from the Lord's exhortation to the angel of the Church in Sardis, to remember how he had received and heard, and to hold fast and repent. To feed the flock, then, was not the character of His ministry among them at this juncture; nor did He at this time intervene in answer to entreaties from His people. He came on the ground of authority to address them, having the seven stars, as He told the angel of the Church in Sardis.

Comparing the tenor of these epistles with the rest which we have in the New Testament, we must be conscious of the difference between the sheep being ministered to of the things of Christ, and souls being admonished as to their ways, or cheered by the Lord's approbation of their faithfulness to Him. Much that was wrong in the different assemblies to which he wrote, Paul had to correct, but he did it, by ministering to them truth in that aspect of it which would especially meet their condition, and at times (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:15) by revealing things previously unknown to them. What was wanted at Corinth would not have suited the assembly at Thessalonica. What he wrote to the Galatians would have been out of place had it been sent to the saints at Philippi; and the line of teaching needed by the Colossians would not have met the Hebrew saints in their difficulties from old associations, and the determined opposition of their countrymen. Yet, differing as these epistles do one from another in the line of truth dwelt on, they all minister Christ to the soul, and thus act as the suited corrective to whatever required it in the assemblies to which they were addressed. Now it is just this class of teaching which is absent in the Lord's communications to the seven assemblies in Asia. Yet He is as much concerned with His people in these addresses as He was, when Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote the different epistles ascribed to them. There the saints were taught truth; here they are admonished, and the faithful encouraged -- just the work of a bishop, as Paul, writing to Titus, sets forth (1:9).

But, as Bishop of our souls, the Lord takes the oversight of individuals. So, in these epistles, which are illustrations of episcopal supervision, the Lord's care of individuals is also exhibited. Addressed always to the angel, the closing exhortation takes notice of individuals. Besides this, "the rest" especially addressed in Thyatira (Rev. 2:24), and the Lord speaks with special commendation of the walk of the undefiled in Sardis (Rev. 3:4); and, if He condemns in most unsparing terms the wicked conduct of Jezebel at Thyatira

(Rev. 2:24), He mentions with marked approval the name of His faithful witness, Antipas, at Pergamos (Rev. 2:13). Again, while He states what is in store for Jezebel's children, He opens a door for those to repent, if they would, who had committed adultery with her, seeking to arrest in their downward course those who were hastening on to everlasting ruin, as well as to uphold to the end those who were mindful of Him. Hence we may turn to these epistles to learn in some measure how the Lord exercises oversight over saints individually, and what He desires for them.

"Admonishing the saints" characterized those who were over them at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:12). "Addicting themselves to the ministry of saints" is the description we have of some who labored at Corinth (1 Cor. 16:15). A similar service does the Lord carry on for all who are His own. Time, circumstances, or locality make no change in His service for us. Death could not sever the Shepherd from His sheep; and now, as risen from the dead, we read of Him, not only as the Shepherd, but also as the Bishop of our souls.

*Words of Truth*, New Series 1:101-106.





## Chapter 2.3

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### *Elders and Leaders*

#### *Elders Which are Among You*

*(on 1 Peter 5:1-4, by W. Kelly)*

Elders [therefore] that [are] among you I exhort that [am] fellow-elder, and witness of the sufferings of Christ, that [am] also partaker of the glory about to be revealed. Tend (or, shepherd) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity, but willingly, not for base gain, but readily, not as lording it over your allotments, but becoming models of the flock. And when the Chief-shepherd is manifested, ye shall receive an unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:1-4, W. Kelly translation).

Men soon perverted service into lordship, though our Lord took pains to anticipate and warn of the danger, and to implant the principle of grace which is suited if held in faith to guard from ill and form the heart according to God. So bold and inveterate was this evil that it followed the apostles themselves up to the last Passover and the Lord's Supper. "There was also a contention among them which is accounted the greater. And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them; and they that have authority over them are called benefactors. But ye [shall be] not so; but he that is greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." Blessed Lord, Thou Thyself wert in the midst of them as He that serveth! then on earth, now in heaven, by-and-by in glory, not only in that day but for ever. When the kingdom is given up, all things having been subdued, even then wilt Thou the Son be subject to Him that subjected all things to Thee, that God should be all in all. This will be perfection in all fullness, as it is Thy grace to make it good without end.

But what corruption in Christendom, a loud contradiction of Christianity, to turn the service of the Lord into worldly rank and means, to emulate the pride of life with claim of superiority over rival grandees, in the name of the Crucified One, who here had not where to lay His head, and laid down that it is enough for the disciple to be as his teacher, and a bondman as his lord!

Nor was it only departure from scripture in worldliness; it is as plain ecclesiastically. For the accepted tradition among the ancient systems, Catholic and Protestant, is that to the bishop or overseer belongs the authority of ordination, consecration of persons and places, and excommunication. Now the written word is positive, that what is called ordination belonged solely to apostles, or an apostolic delegate, like Timothy or Titus, commissioned for definite action in a given time and place. Even when the church looked out God-fearing men for external or diaconal service, like the seven in Jerusalem, the apostles set them over this business (Acts 6:3). But the church in scripture never chose elders; nor did elders [choose elders], but only an apostle or an

envoy by his authority. Hence we read (in Acts 14:23) that the apostles Paul and Barnabas on their return to the gathered saints chose for them elders in every church. Is it needful to say that the later day Timothy and Titus followed this model, when authorized to act similarly [Titus 1:5] where Paul could not be? Their instructions are simple and clear, as we can see; and they were faithful. Even the competent advocates of Episcopacy acknowledged that in apostolic times there were elders in each local assembly, and that these elders were bishops, the distinction which is found in the second century being unknown in the first, not even a leader among equals.<sup>5</sup> "The" bishop first appears in the letters of Ignatius, who (if not the inventor of that hitherto unknown official, nay in defiance of all scriptural facts and order) is the first to assume its existence and lofty position. His jurisdiction was limited to those in the city. The diocesan bishop later was another and considerable step away from scripture, as were other superior dignitaries, as the church lost its true character and sunk into, or rose in, the world, till the rivalry of the bishops of Rome and Constantinople became a struggle for primacy in honor of old or new Rome, as mistress of the earth, the office as set forth in God's word being long forgotten and despised.<sup>6</sup>

For therein eldership is never confounded with gift, whether the *χαρισμα* of Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; and 1 Peter 4, or the *δομα* of Eph. 4. For this depends on Christ as the giver, and the Holy Spirit as the power, and never required human choice or appointment, as elders did. The Lord gave them direct. Neither evangelists nor pastors and teachers admitted of intermediate action, any more than apostles or prophets (who constituted the foundation, and therefore were not continued). Apostolic succession is a mere romance, conceived in honor of the bishop when elevated, after the apostles were gone, into an oversight of the overseers, to say nothing of all others, and in fact a creator of them. Thus is presented that threefold singularity of which so many have been and are enamored, the bishop, presbyters, and deacons, undergoing another transformation of presbyters into priests, a change still more opposed to Christianity and the church.

The claim to ordain like an apostle or his delegate would be soon made. To consecrate persons and places would and did follow ere long, although altogether foreign to the New Testament, and as clearly borrowed from the heathen rather than Judaism, which recognized but one sacred center. The title

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5. [See chapter 2.10 for a survey of the learned Dr. John Lightfoot's (an Anglican) review of the rise of episcopacy, illustrating W. Kelly's comment. Also there is an examination of this subject in *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, "Episcopacy: What Ground is there in Scripture or History for Accounting it an Institution of God?" 20:307-317. See also *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:69.]

6. All are or may be aware of the effort to make capital out of "angels" of the Apocalyptic churches [Rev. 2 and 3]. But this is not now nor ever was a ministerial title save among Irvingites, though Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists have each and all striven (in honor and support of their opposed theories) to divert it from its exceptional place in that great prophecy. It was really such a representative man in each of the seven Asiatic churches as the Lord viewed as identified with the good or evil of these several communities. He might be an elder, or a teacher, or both, or perhaps neither; but he must somehow be responsible for the state of the assembly to be here addressed as its "angel": a man, of course, and not an invisible being, any more than a new official.

to excommunicate was a bold contradiction of the Lord's will and word in committing that solemn responsibility to the assembled saints judging in His name (1 Cor. 5). The apostle Peter dealt personally with a husband and a wife who were guilty of a hypocritical lie to which both had agreed. The apostle Paul could and did deliver blasphemers or other great offenders to Satan. But we may be assured that neither would usurp the function of the assembly in putting away from itself those members that were guilty, after previous warning, of persisting unrepentant in sins incompatible with His presence. Hence we have the latter enjoining on the assemblies distinct action in clearing the saints of what was thus done to their defilement and His dishonor. *He* (though at a distance) had reliable testimony and quite enough to judge the deed; but he insists on the necessity of *their* judging such evils as he indicates. "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover hath been sacrificed, Christ; wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. . . . For what have I to do with judging those that are without? *Do not ye judge* those that are within? whereas those that are without God judgeth. Put away the wicked man from among yourselves." Such is the Lord's commandment to the assembly, not to "the bishops," not to the elders, not to the gifts many as then were there, but to the entire church in Corinth. Who can deny it?

Elders then are here [1 Peter 5] exhorted by him as fellow elders; but one who was "witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also partaker of the glory about to be revealed." It is a fitting and precise description of the facts, and exactly in keeping with his Epistle. He was truly one of "the apostles of the Lamb," as we hear of them in Rev. 21:1. It has been well remarked, how distinct was the place which divine grace gave to Paul; for his it was in the sovereignty of God to be witness of the glory of Christ, and also partaker of His sufferings, beyond the lot of any other in both respects.

It was and is of all moment to regard "the flock" as God's; and all the more, because it is the habitual way even of excellent souls to forget this truth and assume that the sheep whom they feed and tend are their flocks. Such a thought betrays an unwitting denial of God's rights, and falsifies the relation of His sheep, and engenders erroneous interpretation of His word to the hurt of His servants themselves as well as of the saints. Take the common misuse of Heb. 13:17, implying that those that guide, or have the rule, have to give account of the souls who are exhorted to obey them. The truth is, that the guides are called to watch in their behalf as having to give account, not of the sheep, but of their own conduct toward them before the Lord. Again, the unity of the flock of God is undermined by not a few who talk without the least warrant of its consisting of many folds. The Lord on the contrary is showing in John 10, not only that He quits the Jewish fold, and leads His sheep out, but that He has other sheep not of that fold, Gentile believers; both of whom were about to constitute the one flock, as He is the one Shepherd. There was to be no such thing henceforth as a fold, still less many folds, but His new flock. The one flock of Christ contains all Christians. The sheep might gather to His name here, there, and everywhere, with many an under-shepherd; but as He says, "They shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd." This is Christian truth.

"Tend the flock of God that [is] among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity but willingly, nor for base gain but readily." It is not under law but grace, and the zeal of love brightened and cheered strengthened by the crown of rejoicing in those tended, in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming, the contrast of base gain in this life.

Of another danger they are warned: "nor as lording it over your allotments, but becoming models of the flock." If the property which flesh counts our own is not really so to the man of faith, but rather the goods of the Master entrusted to his stewardship, how much more have elders to beware of lording over the allotted charge as if it were theirs? No, they are to become models of the flock in the constant remembrance that it is God's flock, and that they must render account to the Lord how they guided His sheep, as well as of their walk day by day.

Who then, said the Lord, is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household to give the portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say to you, he will make him ruler over all that he hath (Luke 12:42-44). So the apostle speaks here: "When the chief-shepherd is manifested, ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory." Alas! ere long the blessed hope faded from their hearts, and the work of oversight was changed into a title of earthly honor and emolument, and the position a lordly installation if not an enthronement; so that Peter, if allowed to see things as they are now, could not recognize the office, as it was according to God, under what it is become according to man in Christendom. Is this to exaggerate, or to say the truth in love? How deep the fall really!

The apostle was fond of the word "likewise" in a spirit of grace where nature would never have thought of it but rather resented. Thus the latter part of chap. 2 in this epistle is addressed to domestics; and as he had pressed on the saints in general submission to every human institution for the Lord's sake, so he urges it on them particularly to their master in all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the crooked. For this is grace; and we are called, every one of us, to walk in it as we were saved by it. As law characterized Israel, grace should stamp the Christian, even as Christ was full of grace and truth; and who walked submissively as He? To endure when sinning and buffeted, what glory is it? But if when doing good and suffering ye shall endure, this is grace with God. And there too throughout His life Christ is the model, and above all in His death, where He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that being dead to sins we might live to righteousness: an all-important issue, to convict those who misrepresent, hate, and deride grace. "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands" (1 Peter 3:1), says the apostle, and in ver. 7, "Ye husbands, likewise, dwell with them according to knowledge." Such was the order in which the Holy Spirit appealed to each.

Here the exhortation was first on the apostle's part as fellow-elder to the elders among them; and then he adds, Likewise, ye younger, be subject to elders," which evidently goes beyond those in official place to all whose years clothed them with title to moral respect if spent in faithful service to the Lord. Indeed it is to be noticed that among the Jewish saints, and in Jerusalem itself,

we have no record of a formal introduction by apostolic authority as ruled in the Gentile assemblies (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). They are first mentioned as subsisting in Acts 11:30 and recognized in their place by Barnabas and Saul. The fact is strikingly confirmed by Acts 15 wherein they are repeatedly mentioned with honor. Yet the peculiarity alluded to is no less plain in the critical text of ver. 23, which is the opening sentence of the decree determined at the council. It runs, if we heed the Vatican MS., the Alexandrian, the Sinaitic, the Rescript of Paris, and Beza's of Cambridge with other good support, not as in the A. V., "The apostles, and the elders, and the brethren," but "The apostles and the elder brethren"; and this is adopted in the Revised Version, as by Alford, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort, &c. The reading of the later copies, seems due to conforming the phrase with ver. 22. But this was implied here, as it was there expressly asserted to be "with the whole assembly." Nor was it the least likely that the ecclesiastical copyists would have dared to introduce a phrase so alien to their habit of helping on hierarchical distinction. Even Luther, Calvin, and others down to our day have felt constrained to yield to the larger sense of elders and youngers in this context.

"Likewise, ye younger, be subject to elders; and all of you bind on humility to one another; because God setteth himself against haughty ones, and giveth grace to lowly" (ver. 5).

Both exhortations have fallen too often on deaf ears. When the apostles passed away, the presbyters easily persuaded themselves, that order called for one of their number to receive or take a chief place over his fellows in a city; especially as the angels of the seven Asiatic churches<sup>7</sup> in the Apocalypse [Rev. 2 and 3] could by a ready mistake be thus construed, until it rose by degrees to be a diocese of any extent. A presbyter, says a grave commentator (in loco), is not called a bishop by ancient ecclesiastical writers, but a bishop is often called a presbyter. Had he overlooked the fact, that the Holy Spirit in Acts 20:17, 28 *does* call the elders of the church in Ephesus "bishops" (ἐπισκοπους)? Does not inspiration outweigh all ecclesiastical writers put together and demonstrate their unsoundness when they venture to differ? So the apostle addresses the saints "in Philippi with bishops and deacons." Also Titus 1:5-7 is almost equally plain. No doubt it is as much opposed to Dissent as to Episcopacy, "the minister" being as antisciptural as the traditional trio: bishop, priests, and deacons. After the death of the apostles the lawlessness secretly working before grew apace and became bold. The sole divine authority as to this attaches to what they authenticated in the scriptures.

As the elders by unbelieving development sunk in various sorts of clerical irregularity, so did the youngers lose all sense of their due place of subjection. It was an early error that they began to choose bishops on the plea that the multitude of the disciples were allowed to choose men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom for the apostles to appoint over their diaconal work. For where

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7. [Regarding the angel of the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2), observe that Paul called for the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:17), not **the** angel, or **the** elder. The angel in Rev. 2 and 3 does not mean **the** elder.]

elders or bishops were appointed among the Gentile churches, the disciples never chose,<sup>8</sup> but the apostles for them, as in Acts 14:23; or if an apostle could not go, he wrote (not to any church but) to an apostolic man like Timothy or Titus, to appoint elders. For the principle is as plain as it is important. As the church contributed its means [goods/money], it was allowed to choose those it confided in for due administration. But apostles, not the church, had spiritual discernment of the qualities suitable to preside or rule; and they therefore chose elders. Besides, there were endowed with power men that were the gifts of Christ, such as evangelists, pastors, teachers, &c, who were never appointed (like elders locally), but acted freely in their work [everywhere] as they were led by the Spirit in the unity of Christ's body, the church.

In our day both the clerical spirit and the democratic are so rampant that there is all the more need to heed the gracious appeals of the apostle. Let those who guide never forget that the flock is not theirs but God's; and that they are to be models to the flock, not lords. Let the younger be subject to elders on principle, instead of seeking their own will or innovations so natural to youth. No doubt blind guidance ends in a ditch; but such direction is not of a Christian type, which is rather the seeing leading the seeing, with eye and heart fixed on Christ, who thus gives singleness of purpose.<sup>9</sup>

[The following comments are extracted from W. Kelly's *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, referring to Heb. 13:7, 17 and 24. These comments are included here in view of the fact that what we have just seen, above, is that the elders that Peter addressed were not said to be "over," but rather "among," the saints. The KJV uses the word "over" in Hebrews 13, which compare with the translation by J. N. Darby. Here, the translation will be W. Kelly's.]

### ***Hebrews 13:7***

Be mindful of your leaders, who were such as spoke to you the word of God and,

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8. [It is Monsieur Demole's famous argument, that it is not said "and not otherwise" an argument which annuls by a single dash of the pen all the rules and directions of the New Testament. It is never said, that I know of, "and not otherwise"; so that in every case one might change everything, and say, it is not said "and not otherwise." [The thrust of such an argument is that it results in this:] It is a complete justification of all the additions and alterations that popery has introduced in christian worship and ordinances. Doubtless that system does not act according to the word, but it is not said [in Scripture] "and not otherwise," or, "in fact things may also have occurred otherwise." So that it cannot be reproached with any tiring on that score. And these gentlemen, who annul all the directions of the word by this single principle, that they may do otherwise when such is not forbidden by a "and not otherwise," accuse us of abandoning the word, and teaching the abolition of the command! I do not know a more fearful principle, or one more destructive of the authority of God and His word, than this, which has now the sanction of Mons. de Gasparin. Remember, reader, that according to him, when the word gives a direction or a uniform example, and that it cannot be proved that it has not been *also* done otherwise, you have full liberty to abandon the direction of the word and do things as you please.

*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:347, 348, note; see also pp. 240, 241, 378, 382.]

9. W. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter*, in *loco*, and in *The Bible Treasury*.

considering the issue of their course, imitate their faith (Heb. 13:7).

But in this case we must say were, not "are," your guides, for their course was closed, as the verse itself intimates. They had been "leading" men among the brethren like Judas Barsabbas and Silas (Acts 15:22), whether elders or not, for those so named had a larger and higher sphere than a local charge. And the saints are exhorted to hold them in honored memory; as the clause that follows characterizes them as having spoken to them the word of God, not the bare fact that they had so spoken in their day. It is probable that some of their "leaders" had the rule among the saints; but this is not the force of the word here employed, which is of a more general import, and may not have been other than prominence in teaching and exhortation.

There is another word it is well to observe (προϊστάμενοι) of similar import, as we may see in Rom. 12:8, 1 Thess. 5:12, which these scriptures show not to have been restricted to elders, though of course applicable to the exercises of their office. It means "presiding," and has its importance in its due place. But the great present value, as in the past, is that it depended on the spiritual strength which God supplies, and not on official position to which an apostle or an apostolic delegate had appointed: a thing also to be fully owned where the fact was so, as Scripture clearly proves. However this may have been, they had been their leaders, and the brethren are told, considering the issue of their course of life (in old English "their conversation"), to imitate their faith. Some among the Hebrew confessors were in danger of drawing back, as others seem to have actually done. There had been in earlier days a noble stand and severe endurance for it; and here they are exhorted to that which shone in departed guides, some at any rate of whom, it would appear, had resisted to blood (p. 261).

## *Hebrews 13:17*

Obey your leaders and submit, for they watch for your souls as having to render an account; that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for this [would be] unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

Reaction from new truth is a danger at one time, and at another a return to old ways when the new become irksome. So these Christian Jews are exhorted to that which is a constant duty for us no less than for them. Self-will increasingly characterizes this present evil age; and self-will is always sin. Elsewhere, as in Rom. 13, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1, those called to preside or take the lead, elders or not, are exhorted how to fulfil their work in the Lord. Here, as in 1 Cor. 16 [vv. 15, 16] and 1 Thess. 5 [vv. 12, 13], the saints are reminded of what God looks for on their part. Scripture sanctions neither assertion of human right nor arbitrary claim of divine authority in the church of God. All are bound to serve, all responsible to obey the Lord who has made His will sure and plain in the written word. But there is such a thing as spiritual wisdom, and experience which grace forms by the word of righteousness; there is practical power which faith gives by the action of the Holy Spirit, which is eminently serviceable to those less exercised in discerning the path of Christ.

Hence as one must feel in the intricacies which so frequently best saints in



such a world as this, and with a nature on which the enemy can readily act through present things, there is ample room for constant need of godly counsel, serious admonition, or even sharp rebuke; and as to all this the word is "obey your leaders and submit." How often a real guide can point out what a perplexed saint saw not before it was set before him, but, when so set, at once perceives to be of God! For if there be a word of wisdom given to the one through the Spirit, the same Spirit indwelling in the other appreciates the true and right, through the grace of Christ which sets independence aside as well as worldly lust or any other evil thing. Thus is the Lord honored in the chiefs no less than in those that submit to them. Sacerdotal claim is now excluded; and lawlessness is judged as hateful to God. Christ Himself led the way here below in this path of invariable and unswerving obedience; and those that guide will only guide aright if walking in the revealed ways of God which they urge on others; as these are only blessed as they walk in obedience and submission, instead of a vain clamor for their own rights, which if realized would be Satan's slavery. We are, every one of us, bondsmen of the Lord Jesus (pp. 266, 267)

Salute all your leaders and all the saints (Heb. 13:24).

## Chapter 2.4

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### *Is the Ordaining Authority Perpetuated?*

Who then is to do the work of Paul and Barnabas in ordaining elders? Who is to take up the task deputed to Titus by the Apostle Paul? Those who claim and exercise such authority ought to prove that they are similarly, or at least validly, invested with it by the Lord. The attitude of "Brethren" is simple and clear. We do not go beyond the word of God, and are thankful that if we cannot do all that the apostles or their delegates did, we can freely do all that God is pleased to put within our little compass, and find our own blessing and the profit of others proportionate to our fidelity and lowliness, which we pray Him to increase. It is confessed by all men of any weight, and if it were not it is patent to every believer in the word of God, that to preach and pray, to baptize and break bread, *never* needed ordination even in presence of the entire college of apostles. Hence in doing any or all these things, as God leads and enables us, is strictly within the limits of the general orders of Him whose we are and whom we serve. If any men exhibit the qualities required in such as desire to be bishops, or elders, and deacons, we own them and their work, valuing them for their work and submitting to them as over us in the Lord.<sup>10</sup> This 1 Thess. 5, 1 Cor. 16, Rom. 12, show we can do without exceeding our bounds, or imitating Paul and Titus, as some do.<sup>11</sup> Far from narrow views of ministry, we recognize real ministers as well as members in the English Establishment, as well as in the various orthodox Dissenting Societies, as heartily as among ourselves. But this does not hinder our convictions that unscriptural arrangements (partly relics of Popery, partly through governmental influence, partly through lack of heed to God's word) have effaced much truth as to the Church and ministry for Christians in general. Is this impossible or even improbable? I am surprised that any man pretending to teach others should fail to distinguish between an exhortation in 1 Tim. 2, meant expressly for all christian men and women, and a charge as to dealing with bishops, meant for Timothy. Any and all in Timothy's position may act and ought to act thus; but surely all who do should have credentials like Timothy. Who are they now? Those who set up to do what Timothy or Titus did without their authority seem to act "most presumptuously," not those who confine themselves within what they are sure is their duty before God. . . .

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10. [See W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Church of God*, pp. 208ff.]

11. [Numerous comments on appointment of elders are found in the *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 1:108, 268; 4:74, 152-153, 200, 207-208, 215, 219, 226, 230, 281-282, 323, 326-327, 342, 354, 362-363, 376, 382; 10:68, 69; 14:291; *Notes and Jottings* p. 284.]

If Scripture nowhere pledges the perpetuation<sup>12</sup> of an ordaining authority, what is the fair inference? Is it not a perfect standard? Was it not provided for all times and circumstances? Did not God who wrote it give us every requisite for obedience and godly order, individually and corporately, ruler and ruled, teachers and taught, till the Lord come? Is anything lacking to its words which ought to be supplied? It is not "Brethren" at least who imply that it is defective and needs either the supplement of tradition, the system of development, or the new inventions of human wit.

Let us test the principle by facts. Who honor most the Epistles, not to the Corinthians or the Ephesians only, but to Timothy and Titus -- the Christians who let the government of the day choose the bishops or elders; or those who own *they* have not those apostolic envoys, and therefore refuse to go beyond their measure, whether as simple disciples or as possessing gifts as teachers, evangelists, &c.? Far from slighting, it is their sense of the superior place and the definite mission of such as Timothy and Titus, which makes themselves shrink from the pretension to appoint and regulate bishops [overseers/elders] as those did. There is no arguing in a circle, any more than setting aside any scriptures. We cannot but tell the Dissenter that he disobeys them, because in his system the church chooses men to minister in the word and to rule; we cannot but tell the Anglican that he is at least as guilty, because in his system the squire, or the Lord Chancellor, or a college, or the crown chooses similarly both parties in manifest opposition to the uniform practice of the early Church and to the plain word of God. It needs no "positiveness of a pope," but only the simplicity of faith in Scripture to know without a doubt that these Dissenting and Anglican methods are at issue with the only principle of ordaining elders laid down in the Bible. Yet because we hold to this firmly and say so, we are charged with nullifying the Epistles to Timothy and Titus and "taking extraordinary liberties with God's written word!" As honestly asserting the place of apostolic delegates and cleaving to these very epistles, we are obliged to condemn the present practice of Christendom as palpably unscriptural. Will the *Christian Observer* dare to affirm that Anglican or Dissenting appointments (which indeed cannot both be scriptural) are the same as the apostle enjoined on Timothy and Titus? I can understand his soreness and hard names: it is usual with men who know themselves wrong.

"For what purpose, then, we ask again, *as respects us*, were the Epistles to Timothy and Titus?" Surely one weighty lesson, and in order not the last perhaps in the present state of Christendom, is that no Christian should sanction a direct violation of that which they teach us as to the appointment of elders. The *Christian Observer* knows perfectly well that Anglican appointments are not according to those epistles, any more than the popular call of Dissent. If any of the "Brethren" set himself to ordain elders because Titus was commissioned so to do, there would be good reason to challenge his authority and to denounce his acts. Is it not rather too bad to blame us because we refuse any such assumption in deference to these and other scriptures, and frankly allow that none of us has the place of a Timothy or a Titus in this respect?

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12. [See strictures on this in *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:363, 364.]

But the second lesson we gather from these epistles is that a very small part indeed is confined to this peculiar relation of the apostolic delegates to elders. It is in fact with them as with almost all other scriptures: if certain points here and there are special, much the greater portion directly concerns believers in general, and every whit is, or ought to be, instructive to us all. Thus, from first to last in these epistles, how much there is of the deepest importance to every Christian! The value of sound doctrine, the rejection of fables and unprofitable questionings, the end of what the apostle enjoined, even love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and unfeigned faith, and the danger of missing this in the desire to be law-teachers, with the lack of intelligence which invariably accompanies it; for such pervert the law unlawfully to the righteous [1 Tim. 1:9], instead of knowing and using its application to the lawless, impious, unholy, violent, unclean, and in short anything else contrary to the sound doctrine according to the gospel of the glory committed to the apostle: all this is but the beginning of 1 Timothy 1. But why need I thus enlarge? The present value "*as respects us*" is unquestionable; and even that which was exceptional, so far from dying with Paul or Timothy, has this momentous and living use, that it furnishes a divine test to judge whether those who now assume Timothy's functions as to elders have Timothy's qualifications and authority. My knowledge of a magistrate's office and duties, according to the country's laws, does not warrant me to set up myself or my neighbor as a magistrate; but, far from being useless, it may, in a day of difficulty, be the means of preserving others besides myself from owning those who claim to be in the commission of the peace without the necessary authorization (i.e., in fact, from rebellion).

There is a third lesson of great practical value deducible even from the special instructions in the pastoral epistles, where there was no apostle nor apostolic man to appoint local functionaries. They clearly state the qualities spiritual, moral, and even circumstantial, required in bishops or elders. The possession of them all, however unquestionable, would not in my judgment warrant a man to call himself an elder or bishop, nor another who was not duly authorized, nor the assembly so to call him: but it would be the strongest ground, where due ordination could not be had, for all godly minded saints to be subject to such, to recognize them as laboring and taking the lead among brethren in the Lord, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. "Obey your rulers (or leaders, chief men, τοῖς ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν, and submit yourselves," would thus apply to the conscience wherever such men watched over their souls in the fear of God, though no apostle or apostolic delegate had ever penetrated there.

This may suffice for the argument drawn from the pastoral epistles. A wise opponent would have carefully retired from that field. For it is the part of God's oracles which sentences to death ordinary ministerial appointment as hopelessly as 1 Corinthians exposes the actual departure of Christians from God's order for the assembly, and from the principle and the exercise of gifts in it (1 Cor. 12, 14). Do they so much as think of their indifference to these things? <sup>13</sup>

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13. *The Bible Treasury* 6:219-221.



## Chapter 2.5

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### *Human Commission, Laying on of Hands, and Discipline*

The case of Paul in Acts 13, which is some times referred to in proof of the necessity of a human commission,<sup>14</sup> proves in fact the contrary. It would be strange indeed if it did, seeing that in Gal. 1:1 he takes such pains, to insist that he was an apostle, "not of men (*i.e.*, as the source), "nor by man" (as the channel). He had been preaching for years, before this separation by the Spirit to the special work recorded in Acts 13, 14. Further, those who fasted and prayed and laid their hands on him and Barnabas had been cherished and taught by them as by those who were over them in the Lord. To such an imposition of hands I know of no objection. It pretends to confer neither gift nor authority, but is a simple commendation to the grace of God, which it would seem might be repeated (Acts 15:40). Is there one feature in common with the ordination of our day and for ages? Is it possible that Christians, in order more thoroughly to justify a modern ordination by Acts 13, have pretended that Paul was only an inferior apostle, a messenger of the church -- like Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25)? But, see Acts 14:4; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 11:1-6; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; 1 and 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1; where, if we may so say, the highest form of the apostolate is claimed, and its entire independence of man.

It is too often forgotten that Matthias was chosen Jewishly, by lot, before the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven to baptize the believers. The church properly speaking, was not yet manifested. His election therefore can furnish no precedent for a state of things which was changed and governed by the presence of the Spirit. Nor do we read of the use of lots ever afterwards. The Moravian system, with its usual and blind servility, has tried to copy this and other forms which were peculiar to Jerusalem.

In the instance of Timothy, there were prophecies going before (1 Tim. 1:18), and actual gift imparted by prophecy, *with* the imposition of the hands of the presbyters [elders] (1 Tim. 4:14), and the imposition of Paul's hands (2 Tim. 1:6):<sup>15</sup> a case which it is not only impracticable to imitate without an apostle

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14. [For a refutation of the use of Acts 13 to prove clerical ordination, see W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Church of God*, pp. 185, 186.]

15. { That the apostle was God's channel in conferring a special gift of grace on Timothy for his work, as we know was done generally on saints not before landed on Christian ground (Acts 19:1-7), is plain and sure. There were prophecies preceding about Timothy, as a prophet or prophets designated Barnabas and Saul at Antioch. Only in the latter case no gift was conveyed. The laying on of hands by their fellow-laborers was no more than the sign of their

(continued...)

and duly chosen presbytery, not to speak of prophecy, but which is a mischievous pretension, unless there is the power to bestow the gift which was bestowed then. May God deliver His people from saying, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing!"

Lastly, in 2 Tim. 2:2<sup>16</sup> it is evident that the question is one, not of authority to appoint successors, but of communicating the things which Timothy had heard of the apostle by many witnesses. It was not to consecrate a clergy, but to commit sound doctrine to faithful men who should be able to teach others also.

On the other hand the dissenting principle of electing a pastor is purely human, derived not even from Judaism, much less from Christianity. Hear the testimony of one who was himself thus chosen; the author of *Spiritual Despotism* (p. 153).

It is not without some amazement that we find a congregational church, on the modern scheme, proceeding in the momentous act of creating or electing to itself a pastor and teacher, without being able to allege from the New Testament any law or license to that effect, or any one example, satisfactory or unsatisfactory . . . On secular principles nothing can be more simple or reasonable than that those who pay should command; and in the present temper of mankind, especially in certain circles, it may be nearly impracticable to secure submission to any other law. Never-the-less this serious question returns upon us, Is this the law or this the principle recognized as the basis of church polity in the New Testament? We are compelled to answer, It is not.

Yet some have professed to see it in Acts 14. "When they had ordained (or chosen, as seems better) them elders in every church." But this proves not that the church, but that *they* (i.e., Paul and Barnabas) chose the elders. Some argue from the etymology; but usage, not etymology, is the only safe guide. The word (χειροτονεω) meant originally to stretch out the hand. Hence, it was applied to voting in this manner, and by an easy transition to choosing without reference to the manner. Thus in Acts 10:41 the same word, compounded with a preposition is applied to God's choice, where the notion of the church's voting is of course excluded. When it was a question of a gracious and prudent use of tables, or the like, as in Acts 6 and 2 Cor. 8:19, the assembly, or assemblies, did choose; though even in Acts, if the multitude of the disciples looked out seven faithful men, it was the apostles who appointed them over their business. In

(...continued)

commendation to God's grace for the work given them to do (Acts 13:2-4; 14:26), and was repeated, as we learn from chap. 15. Thus to Timothy a spiritual gift was imparted by the imposition of Paul's hands (2 Tim. 1:6), *with* the accompaniment of the elders (1 Tim. 4:14) who were incapable of conferring the Spirit in any way, but joined by the apostle in that act by way of fellowship. There is no question of "a gift" in Acts 13. Those called in this case had a higher place and a greater gift (see Acts 14:4 [sic; 14:14?]) than the prophets and teachers, whom the Spirit directed to set them apart for His special mission.

*The Bible Treasury*, New Series 2:160.

See also *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 14:339; and, W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Church of God*, pp. 198, 199.}

16. [Concerning 1 Tim. 5:22 see Appendix 2.]

short, when God imparts a gift, *He* chooses; when the church gives what she can, *she* may employ what instrument seems to her fitting. As she cannot bestow a ministerial gift, neither ought she to choose, but to receive all those whom God has given for her good.

As to elders, then, an apostle chooses (Acts 14:23) or leaves a delegate for a season during his own life to appoint them (Titus 1:5-9), or describes to another the requisite qualities (1 Tim. 3:2-7). In no case is the church invited to select them. The saints had no such authority, even in their brightest days. No epistle addressed to a church touches the question, and fitly so. It was not their mission. Titus was left in Crete expressly to set in order what the apostle had left undone, and to appoint elders in every city, as the apostle had appointed him and none else. Afterwards he was to come to the apostle in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). You cannot have the one without the other. This is the sum of what scripture states, unless we add the "angels" of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. But "angel" is neither a gift nor a charge, but a moral representative of each church, and only introduced for special purpose in this great prophecy. Hence all systems with almost equal unreality try to fit in the "angel" to suit their aim. It applies in fact to no such thing, but to the introduction of a judicial book. The apostle looked, and taught the church to look, for the coming of the Lord as their immediate hope. This of course stimulated and in no way hindered present care for the sheep; but it was inconsistent with perpetuating official organs for ages to come. Accordingly we find no such arrangements in the Epistles.

But as for gifts, they rest on quite another ground; not upon apostles who might be removed, but upon Christ, who never ceases to be the head and source of nourishment, and cannot but love and cherish His body the church. These gifts never needed man's sanction, even when apostles lived. Christ dealt them without the intervention of any; so that what Paul said of his own apostolate might be said in principle of them all, "Not of men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." I speak of course of the manner and source of the gifts, not of their measure.

As regards discipline, it is of the utmost importance to bear in mind that it does not depend on gifts, offices, or any other thing than the blessed fact that the body, the church, is Christ's body, is gathered in His name, and has the Holy Ghost present to guide and energize its movements. He is, we may say, the soul of this holy and heavenly body. Hence the fullest directions respecting discipline, either in putting away or in restoring, were given to the Corinthian church, where it would seem there were at the time no elders. That there might be and were churches without elders is manifest from Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. The churches existed before any such charges were appointed. Elders were desirable no doubt for the administration of a church, but by no means indispensable to its being. Certain it is that at Corinth elders are not alluded to, and the disorders which broke out there are pressed home on the entire body. Nor does the Spirit, in correcting the abuses, suspend their functions as a church until elders were duly appointed. On the contrary, whether it be the extreme and solemn act of excision, or the worthy celebration of the Lord's Supper, it is the body which is addressed, rebuked, and charged with ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well, in all these grave particulars. And this is the more striking,



as it is clear that there were among them those who came behind in no gift (1 Cor. 1:7); that, at any rate, the household of Stephanus addicted themselves to the ministry [*i.e.*, service] of the saints, and that the believers in general are besought to submit themselves to such. It is not the laborers, I repeat, but the body which is appealed to in matters which the common consent of a [presently] fallen church has made the peculiar and distinguishing province of the clerical or ministerial order.

Doubtless where overseers were, as at Philippi or Ephesus, they in their exercise of a godly care would naturally and justly have a large share of the practical details; and the more so as an appeal to the church is the last and most painful resort (Matt. 18:15-17), the urgent object being to restore the soul, if so it may be in the Lord. But the known sin of a Christian affects the conscience of the body, for it is one body; and if not judged, a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. If the offender mourn and depart from the evil after a godly sort, he is restored, and all rejoice;<sup>17</sup> if he continue in that which dishonors Christ, the body must be cleared at all cost. "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, . . . For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Put away from among yourselves the wicked person."

Further, scripture even more sternly deals with false doctrine; because it is subtle, more poisonous in its effects, and touches the Lord Himself more directly than a bad walk. It is ever a work of the flesh, and may be emphatically of Satan far more than a mere carnal spirit of action. (See Gal. 5:9-21; Rom. 16:17, 18; 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:23-26; 3:6; 4:3, 4; Titus 3:9; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 10, 11; Rev. 2:14, 15, 23, 24).

As it is the body which puts away, so it is equally for the body, under His direction Who dwells therein, to restore. God may use the instruments He sees fit to rouse the body to a remembrance of Christ's holiness in excluding a wicked person (1 Cor. 5), and of Christ's grace in forgiving and restoring a repentant brother (2 Cor. 2). In either case it is the conscientious action of the body which the Lord expects. If everything fail to awaken -- if, in spite of patient testimony, this assembly persist in doing or cloaking evil, and so in tarnishing the Lord's name, the claim to be His body becomes null and void. It is an entirely corrupt lump, from which the Spirit, who loves Christ, would have us to separate, instead of wasting our energies in the effort to amend that which is irremediable, and only waiting for the judgment of the Lord.

There remains but one more difficulty for us to state and seek to remove. It has been supposed that the assertion of the failure of the church forces us to say

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17. [He spoke of the "offender" noted in Matt. 18, not the sins named in 1 Cor. 5, which require putting away.]

that we in these last days <sup>18</sup> cannot have recourse to the Epistles to the Corinthians, etc.; and so to fall back upon the promise -- "Where two or three are gathered together in [unto] my name, there am I in the midst" [Matt. 18:20]. . . . It has been proved that nationalism and dissent cannot defend the principles of their membership or of their ministry by such scriptures as 1 Cor. 1, 3, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16; Eph. 4, etc. The great truth of the church as being God's habitation through the Spirit [Eph. 2], Who is the sole energy and distributor of the gifts of Christ in the unity of the whole body, is recognized by neither; it could not be practically unity for one moment without condemning both in all their varieties. Are all our brethren responsible to own this truth whatever may be the results of their confession? If they are not, let it be openly said.

But if the church once lived, rejoiced, suffered, in realizing the blessedness of such a place, where and what are we? Are we not to feel, are we not to confess, are we not to have done with, all the evil known to us, which has overspread the professing body and made it a witness against Christ, not for Him? If I find myself honoring as the church of God a society or system whose laws are inconsistent with the leading scriptural principles of that church, am I not to confess my sin, and come out from the unclean thing? or am I to abide and sin on, that grace may abound? This is the true question. <sup>19</sup>

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[See also W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Church of God*, p. 182ff. In an appendix, pp. 217-223, "Note on Acts 14:23," he furnishes "clear and conclusive evidence that the elders were not chosen by the votes of the churches."]

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## ***Additional Notes***

The passage, 1 Timothy 5:22, does not immediately follow after some exhortations about the elder; but it applies to Timothy's personal conduct. I think it probable that hands were laid on elders; because I see that this ancient sign of blessing and of setting apart for a charge was universally used; and that, among other things, the epistle treats of the charge of elder. But so little is it true that it is impossible to apply to any other than the bishop the imposition of which this passage speaks, it is very evident that it is a direction for Timothy's conduct in every case in which he might be called to lay hands on any one. <sup>20</sup>

. . . 1 Timothy 5:22 demonstrates that, even when it is only the ceremony of laying on of hands which is in question, the reference is certainly to discernment and responsibility . . . Timothy was not to lay hands hastily on any one. It was therefore a question of discernment on his part, and grave responsibility with

18. [The "last days" and "the last hour" began in the days of the apostles, not recently or last century.]

19. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 12:373-376.

20. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:254.

regard to the person to whom he gave the sanction of his solemn approval, which shows the very evident meaning of that which follows, namely, that if he did it lightly and the person was unsuitable for this charge, Timothy would have his share in the evil that he might do.<sup>21</sup>

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21. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:355.

## ***Chapter 2.6***

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### ***On the Administration of the Church***

As to what concerns the administration of the Church, the great principles which are found in the word of God are the following.

For the calling, and for the spiritual wants of this Church, God has given certain gifts which act for the increase and the union of the body at all times. Forms have no place whatever. Order is always morally the will of God; now the word provides for it where it is needed (1 Cor. 14; Rom. 12; 1 Pet. 4.) Through the corruption of man, the Church may be found in a state of dilapidation; but, if this be so, the word of God suffices in this case also to the spiritual man, to enable him to judge of it and to direct him in the circumstances in which he finds himself.

This is what our opponents deny. They say that at the beginning God gave rules and forms needful for the walk of the Church, but that these forms do not concern us.

They were, we must surely suppose, in that case, as necessary as they were good in those days, since God gave them by inspiration; but at the present day, although He had shown the necessity for such directions, God has abandoned His Church without leaving it any for its walk.

Let us then examine the positive testimony of scripture on this subject. The word of God presents to us a Church formed on earth<sup>22</sup> by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven when the Son of God took His seat there in glory, having accomplished the work of redemption. This Church is one with its Head. It is the body of which Christ, ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, is the Head; Eph. 1:20-23.

This precious redemption has brought about the establishment of man in this glory in heaven, the manifestation of this glory, such as it is in Jesus, and the participation of poor sinners even in this glory.

In the name of Him who has accomplished redemption, and who is seated in the glory, the Spirit, come down as witness of these things, has called sinners to come out of the world which had rejected Him, and to enjoy the infinite grace which had thus called them according to the counsels of God and washed them in the blood of Him whom the world had crucified. This same Spirit (who, by

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22. We have already given the proofs earlier. The following are passages to be consulted on the subject: John 11:52; ch. 7:39; Ephesians 2: 14-22; ch. 3: 5, 6; ch. 4:4-16; 1 Corinthians 12: 12, 13.

means of those whom God had chosen, had thus called sinners, and had communicated life to them) has also united them in one body, of which this glorified Christ is the Head, of which the Spirit Himself is the link with Christ, and in which He is the link between the members, one with the other. But this link is a living and powerful link, and He acts by a divine operation in the members. The members individually and the body <sup>23</sup> collectively are His temple.

The word shows that this is the basis and source of all true ministry. Ministry is thus linked with the existence of the Church of God and the love of Christ for this body which He nourishes and cherishes as His own flesh. By his unfaithfulness, man has been able to spoil the development of this ministry and of the life of the Church down here, as well as the development of the life in the individual; but the existence of ministry is connected with the very existence of the Church, and the faithfulness of the Head with whom it is united.

Consequently, to affirm that the teaching of the apostles on the subject of ministry and its action does not apply to later ages, is to say that there is no longer either a body of Christ, or faithfulness in its Head to nourish it. That is impossible. Moreover the Comforter will abide with us for ever.

Many things, indeed, are lost. Tongues are no longer spoken, miracles are no longer performed. That which was connected with the external testimony and established the authority of the word is no longer found in the present day, but that which is of the substance of the things, that is to say ministry which calls and which nourishes, exists at all times. 1 Corinthians 4 and 14; Romans 12; and 1 Peter 4:10, 11, contain instructions the force of which will subsist as long as the Church shall be on earth. One ought to take account of other passages which reveal to the heart and conscience our actual position before God, and which, in various respects, modify the application of those I have named; but until we are come to the measure of the stature of Christ, He will nourish the Church for its increase, and the Church will make increase of itself by this means.

Now, it is this ministry, its action, the rules which apply to it, that are in question. As to organization, we are but little reproached with too much insisting upon it.

To my mind, it is evident that the coming of Christ was before the eyes of the apostles; and this, whilst at the same time caring for the Church in an indefatigable manner, and making provision that such care should not fail it. But the apostles could not cause that the power -- and there was power -- of their ministry should continue after their death. See what Paul says to the Ephesians (Acts 20:22-30), and what Peter teaches; 1 Peter 1:14, 15. Now, the kingdom of God is in power. The power of the ministry of the apostles has disappeared, and the consequence has gradually been the corruption of the Church and frightful disorder; so that one has seen what was called order and holy orders become the seat of the enemy's power, and what called itself the Church to be that which truth had to combat.

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23. This is so far inexact as that His body is not the temple; collective Christians, however, are.

Now, in the perilous times of the last days, when there should be the form of godliness and its power denied, to what does the apostle (in view of everything which, before his prophetic eyes was springing up in the Church) direct his beloved Timothy, his son in the faith, this devoted heart into which he was pouring out his own? Here is the language he holds to him, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. . . . All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Now, it is very certain that this goes much farther than direction for the walk of the Church, that it embraces everything. The man of God is not simply a Christian; he is a man acting in the work and Church of God. This was the case with Timothy, to whom the epistle is addressed, and to whom Paul says, "Thou, O man of God," 1 Tim. 6:11. He needed to know how he ought to behave himself in the house of God; 1 Tim. 3:15. Now for these times, after the departure of the apostle (times in which his immediate care would be wanting to the Church, and evil would go on increasing), to what does the apostle direct the faith of the man of God? Precisely to divinely inspired scripture, to that which we are told not to make a law of, to that which, if it must be said, is derided as a code, to what Timothy had learned from him (and where shall we learn from him, if not in the written word?); to the scriptures in fine, that he might be perfect and furnished unto every good work. Now I think that the work of the ministry and the care of the Church are a good work; at all events the apostle expressly says so to Timothy; 1 Tim. 3:1.

So likewise it is to God and to *the word of His grace*, that, in similar circumstances, the apostle commends the elders of Ephesus; Acts 20:29-32. All this relates to the administration of the Church.

If, then, we cannot do certain things, it is not that the authority of the word is wanting to us as to these things, nor that it is not our blessing to possess these precious directions in which God has shown us that He has thought of the least wants of His Church; but we acknowledge our weakness; and we do not pretend to do what God has not committed to us. Thus, for example, I do not pretend to name either elders or deacons. If others pretend to have the spiritual discernment and the authority necessary for this, let them do it; but of this I have not discerned the proofs -- very far from it. More than this: he who should make such a pretension seems to me not to understand at all either the state of the Church, or the thoughts of God, to act contrary to the will of God, and to lack precisely that which is necessary in order to direct the Church, namely, intelligence of the thoughts of God. Do I despise the functions of elders and deacons? Do I love disorder? Far from it. And if I do not pretend to establish anyone in these offices, I own (blessing God with all my heart for it) the qualities requisite for them when they are manifested. I lend them all the moral support which spiritual respect with regard to what God has given them can afford, and I associate myself with them as far as it belongs to me to do so. And the word furnishes me with directions on this subject. It calls on me to own those who labor, those who give themselves to the ministry (diaconate) of the saints and to submit myself to them; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; 1 Cor. 16:15; Heb.

13:7-17; 1 Peter 5:2-6. I do not treat this subject at length, but only in its relation to the authority of the word, while blessing God in that itself furnishes the answer to all its adversaries, from whatever quarter they may arise.<sup>24</sup>

[Concerning 1 Thess 5:12, 13, etc., see also *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 14:11; 1:149; 3:240; 4:74, 154, 209, 212, 224. For 1 Cor. 16, 16 see *ibid.* 1:149; 4:225; 13:201; 27:321-322.]

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24. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:71-75.

## Chapter 2.7

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### Qualifications for Oversight

... [a certain brother] and myself are not elders . . . <sup>25</sup>

An unmarried man might be a ruler, but he could not be an elder. A ruler is a gift, <sup>26</sup> an elder an office; gifts are for the body; office is local. We have an example in Timothy of a young man who ruled elders. A ruler is a person who gets an ascendancy over others morally, and keeps their wills from working by the power of the word in the Spirit. <sup>27</sup>

### Introduction

1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 contain the moral qualities that are to be looked for in an elder. There is a moral order in God's house; and elders, whose work was oversight, had to do with spiritual order, while deacons, whose work regarded tables (Acts 6:2), had to do with temporal order -- and this accounts for some differences regarding qualifications found in 1 Tim. 3.

Sometimes a questioner says, "if we cannot have officially appointed elders today, then of what use is such a passage as 1 Tim. 3:1-7?" If asked with the intention to gain light, rather than cavilling about the truth of the matter, such can learn that though the church lies in irrecoverable ruin, what is moral cannot be ruined. Thus, there exist men today in whom are found these moral qualities

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25. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:210. He is speaking of a man who had, like himself, never married.

26. ["He that leads, with diligence" (Rom. 12:8), refers to a *gift*, not a local charge like eldership. A gift is for the body; i.e., this gift may be of use anywhere, while an elder is an elder only in the assembly where he is located. Personally, I do not doubt that he had the *gift* of leading. Though he used the word "rule" in this quotation, in fact, the word "rule" does not appear in his translation in connection with eldership, or in this case, with the gift. J. N. Darby is himself an example of such a gift used in many places, though he was not an elder. It is an excellent thing if an elder did have this gift.

This leading is "with diligence," indicating that carefulness for the Lord's honor and the saints welfare (in that order) is persistently, constantly and carefully sought.

1 Cor. 12:28 mentions the gift of government.

This word is found only here in the New Testament. He is speaking of members of the body set in the assembly. Those thus designated would be gifted to guide and direct the assembly, as a pilot does his ship in her dangers and difficulties. It might be by the word of wisdom, in the application of divine intelligence to those things through which she had to pass; or the word of knowledge, &c., as in verse 8. The thought is guidance rather than rule (*Words of Truth* 5:38).]

27. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 27:312.



suitable in those who desire to exercise oversight. We have previously seen that the Word of God makes provision for leading and guidance in the assembly by those not officially established as elders. This continues on to this very day.

The elders were not a legislative body; their responsibility is to take care of the assembly in accordance with revealed truth.

Let us now consider 1 Tim. 3:1-7 verse by verse.

## ***1 Timothy 3:1: Desire to do a Good Work***

The word [is] faithful: <sup>28</sup> if anyone aspires to exercise oversight, he desires a good work.

**Aspiration and desire.** It has been frequently noted that the word for "aspire" (*oregomai*) means to stretch oneself out, while the word for "desires" (*epithumeo*) means to set one's heart on something, indicating a strong desire.

**The good work.** Before the apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders to take heed "to all the flock, wherein the Holy Ghost has set you as overseers . . .," he said: "**Take heed to yourselves**" (Acts 20:28). A man had better oversee himself before he aspires to exercise oversight in the house of God! There are not lacking men who aspire to exercise, more or less, popery in their sphere; men whose egos are at work and are wilful to "be somebody," with shameful flesh masquerading as something Christian and spiritual. Such an one is aspiring to authority, <sup>29</sup> and wishes to direct, whereas we read in this verse that the true

28. See also 1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; and Titus 3:8 for this expression.

29. The love of ruling has been the ruin of the nominal church, not only in the bishops of old, whom Constantine set aside and supplanted, but in the bishops after Constantine; in the governments at the time of the Reformation, in all of Protestantism and Nonconformity, from wilful Diotrephes downwards. Had they but known what the assembly of God was and is, it could not have been so.

In some cases, and where the majority were willing to sanction it, some deficit or some sin has been known to one or another; but nothing has been done. And why not? On the plea, "I told it to So-and-so, and he did not see with me, or could do nothing." I answer, "Try what you can do, and then tell it to the assembly. Despise not your responsibility and God in it."

I have known cases in which one or two have unconsciously assumed to rule, by telling one that had sinned that "he had *better not come to the table*." Where is the authority and power of the assembly? A private opinion of one or two individuals is not the action of the one holy assembly, led by God and the written Word. It falsifies everything, and is the assumption of power. It is evil, too, for it generally hides the sin which God's word would have either cured or set aside. And what means suspended communion? It is either a refusal to have faith and act upon it according to the Word, or else to bear the shame of incompetency, through sin, to find out God's mind about the matter in question, and ourselves and the assembly.

Again, what is *the leaving of the table* of one's own accord, or allowing others so to leave it? It is self-will, love of one's own way, and the expression of blindness as to the true character of the table.

P. S. -- Whatever you do in any matters of the assembly of God, do it as having the heart  
(continued...)

overseer "desires a good **work**." Such work, carried out in the will of the Lord, is not palatable to the flesh. The proof of this is the moral features listed below, which are of such a character that they are the opposite of the working of the flesh in the overseer; and this is necessary in order for the exercise of an oversight that guides the assembly in suitable order that becomes the house of God. The first thing to aspire to, then, is by God's grace to manifest the moral features noted in this chapter. Let us place "be" before "do." 1 Peter 5:3 says, "being models for the flock."

The second thing that Paul told the elders was that they should **take heed to the flock** (Acts 20:28). Timothy was told:

Give heed to thyself and to the teaching; continue in them; for, doing this, thou shalt save both thyself and those that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:16).

This refers to practical salvation in the Christian pathway; salvation from many a bypath into which the flesh would take us. We must watch over ourselves, pay close attention to the teaching (the doctrines) and continue in the practice of what those doctrines mean. How important "the teaching"; sound teaching is the foundation for sound practice and walk before the Lord, for ourselves, our families and for the assembly. All who undervalue, or denigrate, doctrine are making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Rom. 13:14). Timothy was thus to have an effect on those who heard him. True overseers would exercise such care, first for themselves and then for others.

Notice that the overseers were to "take heed to all the flock, wherein <sup>30</sup> the Holy Ghost has set you as overseers." They were set *in*, not over, the flock.

The third point to notice is that there was an objective in this taking heed that had the assembly in view: "to **shepherd the assembly of God**." Shepherds feed the flock and make them rest at noon (S. of S. 1:7). They wash the sheep when it is needed and rejoice in the fruitfulness of the sheep. They do the opposite of the worthless, or idolatrous shepherd note in Zech. 11:15-17, who is the final Antichrist. And, the fairest among women was instructed to feed her kids besides the shepherd's booths (S. of S. 1:8), in convenient proximity to guidance.

The fourth duty to which they were directed was "Wherefore **watch**" (Acts 20:30). The grievous wolves that would "come in amongst you" means come in among the assembly. Moreover, "from among your own selves shall men rise up . . ." means from among the assembly -- over which they were exercising oversight. They were to watch against corruption from without and from

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(...continued)

and mind of Christ, as well as being one spirit with Him (*Memorials of the Ministry of G. V. Wigram* 2: 63, 64).

30. There is only **one flock** (John 10:16). Those who speak of "my flock" expose the thought of their heart. They are over the flock, rather than in it. Acts 20:28 does not say "over which the Holy Ghost has set you," but, rather, "wherein the Holy Ghost has set you." They were part of the flock, in it, and overseers in connection with that part of the flock at Ephesus. Thus the wording of 1 Peter 5:2: "shepherd the flock of God which [is] among you." There is only one flock, and some of it was at Ephesus.

within. Compare this with Jude 4. The overseers watch regarding the souls of the saints (Heb. 13:17).

A fifth duty of the elder was to **take the lead**.

Let the elders that take the lead [among the saints] well be esteemed worthy of double honor,<sup>31</sup> specially those laboring in word and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17).

This verse tells us that:

1. elders take the lead, or as W. Kelly translates, "preside";
2. all elders are to be honored;
3. the elders that lead well are esteemed worthy of double honor;
4. if besides being an elder, he labored in the public ministry of the Word of God, "there is especial value, beyond that double honor, due to those";<sup>32</sup>
5. some elders had a gift(s) of public ministry of the word and teaching, and some did not.

The business of the elders was to rule or take the lead among the saints. They

31. Question. It is alleged that in 1 Timothy 5:17 the word "pay" should stand instead of "honor," and that those who were charged with the care of a local church received stipends. Is this correct? S. B.

Answer. The word τιμήν in the text does not mean "pay," but "honor" as its radical and primary signification, that is, the due expression or payment of esteem or worship as the case might be; hence the dignity, or prerogative, of one so honored; and even the office, authority or rank; and the present, or offering, commonly given in such cases. It was also used for the worth or price of a thing; for an assessment or even penalty, compensation or satisfaction. But "pay" in the sense of stipend or wages as expressed in general by μισθος, which, in strict application, would have been scouted by every Christian heart, is used in a free or simple way by the Lord in Luke 10, and by the apostle in 1 Timothy 5, not as a standing fee. (Cf. John 10). Later Greek, such as in the LXX or the Greek Testament, gives οψώνιον, military pay or rations, as may be seen in Luke 3, Romans 6, 1 Corinthians 9 and 2 Corinthians 11, to which the curious can add Esdras 4:56, 1 Macc. 3:28, and 14:32. As to the phrase, see what Josephus (Antiq. IV., iv. 114) says of Balak . . .

It cannot then be fairly doubted that the English version is justified, and that salary or pay is not the prominent or even true idea, but "honor." Still that there is included every loving consideration of the elders taking the lead or presiding well seems plain from what follows, but this rather as *honorarium* than as *stipendium*. On the one hand it is degrading to the service of Christ when it is made a question of the earnings of a trade or profession; but on the other it is a dishonor to the saints who reap the fruit of unremitting and unselfish care in spiritual things if they do not mark their sense of it, not merely where the saints are needy, but in the reciprocity of loving regard where no such want exists. The payment of "honor," nay, "double honor," might be questioned where there was not the apparent desire to prove it. The apostle had enjoined on Timothy, in the preceding verses, to "honor widows"; here he claims honor doubly for elders that take the lead well. That "double" was used for indefinitely great in good or evil, one sees in Matthew 23, Revelation 18:6, as in Isaiah 40:2. The "especially" (μαλιστα) that follows is incompatible with a fixed salary, as indeed is all scripture. The general principle is equally true of those who teach (Gal. 6:6), and of those who preach (1 Cor. 9). Acts 28:10 seems to distinguish the attentions paid during the stay at Melita from the provision of requisites on departing (*The Bible Treasury* 11:240).

32. W. Kelly, *An Exposition of the Two Epistles to Timothy*, London: Hammond, third ed., p. 108.

were responsible to see to godly order in public and private; and hence . . . qualities were looked for which would give them moral weight, not only cheering the weak and timid and tired, but in repressing the forward, and rebuking the disorderly.<sup>33</sup>

1 Tim. 5:18, 19 refers to the fact that some elders may need help in temporal things. W. Kelly wrote:

"Honor" is the right version and sense, not "maintenance" or "price" though, as we have seen, it often means so elsewhere. But here such a force is only tolerable in eyes rendered dim by the mist of evil influence and habits in Christendom. "Honor" however, as the true and larger word, would imply this where support was needed . . . Such men ought no more to be forgotten than the evangelists (1 Cor. 9), though the latter may labor "without," the former "within."<sup>34</sup>

The work of the elder is comprehended in the phrase found in 1 Tim. 3:5: "take care of the assembly of God." This is the "**good** work" of v. 1. Cp. Luke 10:34, 35.

### ***1 Thess. 5:12, 13: the Good Work in the Time of Ruin***

But we beg you, brethren, to know those who labor among you, and take the lead among you in [the] Lord, and admonish you, and to regard them exceedingly in love on account of their work. Be in peace among yourselves (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

The Thessalonians were told to "know" (*oida*) those who labored among them. There are two Greek words for "know":

. . . *ginosko* and *oida*. The former signifies objective knowledge, what a man has learned or acquired. The English expression 'being acquainted with' perhaps conveys the meaning. *Oida* conveys the thought of what is inward, the inward consciousness in the mind, intuitive knowledge not immediately derived from what is external.<sup>35</sup>

Elders had not been appointed in this assembly. And had they been appointed, the saints would know (*ginosko*) them. Rather, the saints were to be exercised to have that inward, subjective consciousness of those whose labor, leadership and admonitions indicted the place the Lord had given them, even though there was no official appointment as elders. This, of course, continues on in the ruin of the church on earth in testimony, when officiality no longer exists. "Regard them exceedingly in love on account of their work." It was exercising oversight. "If anyone aspires to exercise oversight, he desires a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1).

There is a quality in the saints that is much needed in a time of ruin for the good work of oversight to be carried on; and that is discernment and

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33. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 110.

35. Footnote to *know* in 1 Cor. 8:1 in J. N. Darby's translation.

acknowledgment of those who so labor, coupled with a spirit of subjection and love. How else secure the peace? Such a Scripture is a great help to us in the time of ruin when we do not have apostolic, official appointment. However, what is moral continues.

A difficulty may be felt by some children of God. They may enquire, how is it, if these charges [official eldership] were not intended to be continued, that the Holy Ghost inspired these directions? I believe that they are of the utmost practical value in two ways: first, negatively, and second, positively; negatively, inasmuch as they enable us to judge the pretensions of those who appoint, and of those that are appointed. By their help, we can see that those who boast most of ministerial order are the very men who palpably offend against these scriptures as well as others. It will always be found, and more particularly in a day of difficulty and darkness, that there is no security except by dependence on the Lord and cleaving to His word. Not only do the simple and the humble find themselves kept of the Lord's grace, but the truest order will prove to be among them. Wherever order is confidently vaunted of, be not surprised to discover a real departure from that which the Lord prescribes. His word invariably refutes, as His Spirit never formed, so self-complacent a tone.

But then there is a more direct value still. Undoubtedly there are some things wanting now; and I for one believe that it is of God that they should be wanting in the present state of Christendom. Where would be the moral fitness of sound exterior order, when the condition is deplorably bad, the world is rampant, the word exercises small authority, and the Spirit of God is systematically hindered and quenched? As to the matter of appointing these local officers, the apostles were the pillars of authority. The absence of apostles, and consequently of such a delegate as Titus, is fatal to those who set up to have everything fully and literally according to the word of God. For my part, far from considering this fatal for God's glory in the present state of Christendom, I believe that the presence of apostles would be an enormous anomaly. The reason is simple. Anything would be unseasonable now that tends to weaken the sense -- first, that God's mind, God's truth -- no matter what it may be about -- abides unchangeable and obligatory; and, secondly, that God takes account of the present scattering of His children, and would have us to feel the havoc that has been wrought in Christendom. Now suppose the apostles (as we cannot but suppose they must) adhere to nothing but the word of God, what could keep them from seeming to deny the relationship of the mass of misled Christians, carried away by error, self-will, human tradition, &c., contrary to the word? God was pleased, in view of the corruption already begun [in apostolic days], and still graver departure from His word that was impending, to cause that there should be no perpetuation of the apostles; that there should be consequently a lack felt, which could not be made good, yet essential to that outward order which men would most loudly pretend to when it was irreparably lost.

Thus the path of lowly obedience is easily proved to be the only safe and sound one; because it refuses to swerve from God's word; it acknowledges the absence of a validating authority which none on earth possesses; it justifies the Lord, who is adequate for all exigencies, and provides amply for every present need; it confesses the ruined state of God's testimony in the earth, while it owns whatever of Himself there may be, and wherever it is. Yet none the less, but the more, it adheres to the word of God, as the only warrant of faith and conduct in a state of ruin. The directions the apostle gives are not in vain, though neither you nor I can do all that Titus did. To do so would be presumption. *He was*

expressly left in Crete, and charged by the apostle to appoint elders there [Titus 1:5]; and we are not. There is no disobedience nor neglect on our part, but rather fear of God, and maintenance of godly order in not exceeding our real powers. But there is manifest haughtiness in all who imitate an apostle, or an apostolic delegate, without warrant from the Lord, and infringing His word in that imitation. Who on earth now can authorize like Paul? Who can appoint like Titus? Certainly not a minister of the Crown, or an ordinary preacher, or a synod of preachers, still less a Christian congregation.

God took care that the direction should not be in a general epistle, nor in one addressed to an assembly. In the epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, &c. no such orders are given, any more than in those of James, Peter, or John. When the apostle addresses the church in any place, he never lays down injunctions about the appointment of elders or bishops. Had it been so, either the leading brethren, or perhaps the saints as a whole, would have been too ready to take the matter into their own hands. As it is, there is no possible excuse for it. Directions are given to individuals who had a special place in the work and church of God. No other was qualified so to do. Thus Apollos and Silas never attempt it, while Titus does. An inspired epistle was addressed to him. No doubt there was a suitability in his gift; but besides that he has an outward authority and inspired credentials, on which he was entitled -- nay, bound -- to act. Where is there such a person at the present time? Hence, therefore, for any one to act upon the fact that Titus was thus empowered by the Spirit of God would be altogether invalid. But then for that reason these directions, far from being obsolete, are of permanent value.<sup>36</sup>

In 1 Thess. 5:12, 13 the apostle writes, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." The presence of elders is not requisite in order to have and to own those who are over us in the Lord. There is much of importance for us now in that Scripture, for we have elders no more than they. I think we ought to lay its exhortations to heart. There are within and without, not a few ill-instructed souls who hold the notion that, unless there be official appointment, they cannot have anybody over them in the Lord. This is all a mistake. No doubt, when a man was officially appointed, there was a definite guarantee in the face of the church given by an apostle or an apostolic man; and there was thereby no little weight given to those who were thus appointed. Such a sanction had great and just value in the church, and would be of consequence among the unruly. But none the less did God know how to provide instruction for assemblies where there was not yet official oversight. How merciful for times when, for want of apostles, there could be no elders! But it will be noticed that the Corinthian assembly abounded in gift, though elders are seen nowhere among them. The Thessalonians do not appear to have possessed the same variety of outward power [in gifts], while elders or bishops again are never hinted at. Yet at Corinth the household of Stephanas devoted themselves regularly (εταξαν) to the service of the saints; and the apostle beseeches the brethren to submit themselves to such, and to every one that helped and labored. The Thessalonians he prays to know those who labored among them, and presided in the Lord, and admonished them. Evidently this did

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36. *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle*, London: Broom, pp. 419-423 (1869).

not depend upon their being apostolically appointed, which could hardly have been in their circumstances as lately [recently] gathered. It is founded upon that which after all is intrinsically better, if we must be content with one blessing out of two. Surely, if it comes to be a question between real spiritual power and outward office, no Christian ought to hesitate between them. To have the power and the office combined is no doubt the best of all, when the Lord is pleased to give both; but in those early days we see that individuals were often and rightly engaged in the work of the Lord before there could be the seal of an apostle, as it were, affixed; and such the apostle encourages and commends earnestly to the love and esteem of the saints before and independently of that seal. How precious that we can fall back on this principle now!

Even at Corinth and Thessalonica then those were raised up in the midst of the saints who showed spiritual ability in guiding and directing others. That was the work of those to whom one epistle exhorted subjection, and whom the other epistle commended as "over them in the Lord." Such men as these did not labor only; because some might be actively engaged in the Lord's work who might not be over others in the Lord. But these manifested power to meet difficulties in the church, and to battle with that which was ensnaring souls, and so to guide and encourage the weak and baffle the efforts of the enemy. They were not afraid to trust the Lord in times of trial and danger, and therefore the Lord used them, giving them power to discern and courage to act upon what they did discern.<sup>37</sup>

### ***1 Tim. 3:2-7: The Qualities for the Good Work***

There are four spheres which are noted in this passage: the personal life, the assembly, the home, and the world. Qualification precedes office; and conduct in these spheres is taken into account.

#### **VERSE 2**

The overseer then must be irreproachable, husband of one wife, sober, discreet, decorous, hospitable, apt to teach:

**Irreproachable.** This indicates a person who has no valid charge against himself, and deserves to have no such charge. Such a quality should be found in the saints (1 Tim. 5:7; 6:14).

In 1 Tim. 5:19 we read:

Against an elder receive not an accusation unless where there are two or three witnesses.

If there is reproach, there must be two or three witnesses to the matter; *witnesses*, not gossipers, not hearers of "hearsay," not biased persons. There are those who balk at restraint and such usually have some viciousness in their tongues and slanderous remarks issuing from their mouths regarding those who would restrain, or rebuke, and turn them from their fleshly will and ways.

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<sup>37</sup>. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 10:47, 48.

**Husband of one wife.** This is not the same as saying: "was married only once." The statement is prohibitive, not prescriptive. A man might have reared children in such a way that he met the requirement of 1 Tim. 3:5. He might subsequently be a widower and then remarried. That does not debar him from exercising oversight, any more than a young man who may have lost his wife, remarried and reared believing children, in an orderly house.

By not being a prescriptive statement I mean that this does not say, "husband of a wife," as if the intent is that a widower who has otherwise met all of the requirements must cease oversight, if his wife died.

Instead, it is a prohibitive statement, forbidding a man with a plurality of wives where polygamy is practiced from exercising oversight, as W. Kelly observed:

If a man had more than one wife, he was not to be then refused fellowship; for many a Jew or Gentile so situated might believe the gospel; but ineligible to be a holy guardian of order according to God among the saints.<sup>38</sup>

For example, there are today Muslims who have several wives. In particular, I remember seeing a letter from a missionary in Africa who wrote that at a supper of a number of missionaries, the subject of chief X, (who was not a Muslim) who had 10 wives, came under discussion. He had been saved but this group would not let him participate in their "Communion Service" until he had disposed of nine of them. This missionary wrote that there was happiness that he was down to nine wives, having given one to his brother! However, to the letter-writer's credit, he expressed sorrow over this, and wondered if there was no other solution. Well, indeed there is, as seen in W. Kelly's correct remarks.

The chief had wives and children; and now saved, it is still his responsibility to care for them, not to give them away, or merely to send them out. The very notion is deeply shocking. These wives and children are what 1 Tim. 5:8 calls "his own." "To dismiss his wives would be wrong"<sup>39</sup> Of course they remained his wives, though the situation is far short of what God had instituted from the beginning. He owed them the duties of a husband, whatever the governmental consequence that attached to the situation. The plain inference is the Lord's displeasure with polygamy. It would hardly be tolerable in a man already a Christian to take multiple wives -- certainly a **criminal** act in many countries. A scripture that bears on this is:

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and specially for those of [his] house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than the unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8).

E. Dennett remarked:

Christianity forbids the practise of it [polygamy], taking us back in this, as in other things, to creation order; but it does not enjoin on the polygamist, when converted, the putting away of his wives. How God in his compassion cares for

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38. *An Exposition of the two Epistles to Timothy*, Hammond: London, third ed., p. 60.

39. W. Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle*, London: Broom, p. 380, (1869).



the woman! The polygamist, however, was disqualified as such for being an office-bearer in the Church of God. The burden of such a state of things was thus placed by God on the shoulders of the right person -- the man, not the woman.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the chief is in a present situation that does not reflect Christ and the church; and therefore he is debarred from exercising oversight -- though he was a chief. There are those who find it easy to wipe away everything that a man has done before he was saved by saying that the blood wipes the slate clean. Let us observe that here we have a case where the saved man's marital status, contracted before salvation, determines something about his status in the house of God.

**Sober.** Sobriety should mark others also, as we see from 1 Tim. 3:11 and Titus 2:2. The character and walk will thus be calm, even, steady, as under the eye of the Lord.

**Discreet.** Such a person conducts himself in a sound-minded, self-controlled way (cp. Titus 1:8; 2:2, 5). Conduct characterized by rashness and sudden impulses would not show discretion.

**Decorous.** Interestingly, this word is used in 1 Tim 2:9 where women are told to dress with *modesty*, thus used in that case of outward appearance (which ought to reflect the inward character). There is such a thing as a decorous character and behavior.

**Hospitable.** See Rom. 12:13; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9. In Heb. 13:1-5 there are three words compounded with love (*phila*): love of brother ("brotherly love"); love of stranger ("hospitality"); and, v. 5, love of money. The real practice of the first two of these three will help curtail the third one. Others were to be hospitable as is the overseer.<sup>41</sup>

**Apt to teach.** This is pressed into service in support of mixing gift and office, especially by those who seem unable, or unwilling, to distinguish the two, and confound a pastor with eldership. Aptness to teach does not mean, or imply, a gift.

The pastor<sup>42</sup> as such fed and taught: it is directly connected with teaching (under one article in Greek, Eph. 4:11), but goes further than teaching, as not merely expounding and putting forth the word, but suiting it to souls, and caring for them in a shepherding way. An elder is an overseer, looks after them in moral oversight. It was desirable that he should be διδακτικός not a proper gift of teacher, but able to use the word in his oversight, as it of course added weight and intelligence to his inspection of their ways; but some [elders] had, some had not, this desirable qualification, for it is said "especially they who labor in the word and doctrine" [1 Tim. 5:17]. What was proper to them was mature habits

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40. *The Christian Friend*, 1883, p. 82.

41. One must be careful of abusing the hospitality of others. The Scripture speaks of good works for necessary wants. It really is not a Christian privilege that I go on an extended sight-seeing tour and expect saints of God to bear the cost by my imposing on their hospitality.

42. See also *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:8; 1:265, 267.]

of family care which qualified them for the exercise of oversight in general, and subdueness of self, and order. None of these things were looked for in the pastor; it was a positive gift from Christ on high, and exercised in the whole body wherever a person was, whereas an elder was a local overseer of people. The word "elder," which seems to imply generally age enough to give weight to the position, seen also in his having a well-regulated family, but it is not the word used for an old man: married men with a well-ordered subject family they had to be.<sup>43</sup>

In Titus 1:9 we read:

clinging to the faithful word according to the doctrine taught, that he may be able both to encourage with sound teaching and refute gainsayers.

This is more than talking about the Word of God. The Word has worked, and is working, in the soul, and the overseer clings to it. He uses what he has learned in the school of God and under His hand, having applied it first of all to himself and in his house. I have known brethren who are, rather, *apt to talk*; and, with that, may have a love to rule, all the while being quite unqualified for the "good work" of v. 1.

### VERSE 3

not given to excesses from wine, not a striker, but mild, not addicted to contention, not fond of money.

We have had seven matters before us, above; and in verses 3-6 there are seven more, and then the matter of the testimony from those without, in v. 7. In v. 3 we have five requirements.

**Not given to excesses from wine.** See Prov. 23:29, 30. Is it not obvious that this is not an exhortation against excesses from grape juice? In Titus 1:7 we read, "not disorderly through wine." Watchfulness over oneself, and the ninth fruit of the Spirit are much to be observed.

**Not a striker.** I have heard stories of Christians in fist-fights with one another, or threatening fellow Christians with a clenched fist waved before their face.

**But mild.** This should characterize all saints (Titus 3:2)

**Not addicted to contention.** This is a phrase that can easily be abused by persons who do not care to have evil exposed or disorder corrected. There is a sense in which J. N. Darby engaged in many contentions. The "bondman of the Lord ought not to contend, but be gentle towards all" (2 Tim. 2:24). Observe that the previous verse says, "But foolish and senseless questionings avoid, knowing that they beget contentions" (2 Tim. 2:23). Am I wrong to suggest a connection, a very direct one, between the two adjacent sentences? The fact is that the overseer is not to be a person who never contends. He is not to have the specified *addiction*. J. N. Darby often contended. He said somewhere that he was weary of contentions. He preferred the positive exposition of truth; but opposers need to be answered. We read, "in meekness setting right those who oppose" (2 Tim. 2:25). Meekness does not mean being a "sissy." Meekness is

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43. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:444.

not insisting on one's own place and rights. Our blessed Lord had strong words for some people, yet He was meek and lowly of heart. And if I may refer once more to JND, a reading of his writings showed that he did not answer personal attack, and he exhorted those with whom he walked in practical fellowship to likewise avoid doing so.

**Not fond of money.** Alas; today how 'Christian' TV evangelists enrich themselves is the target of public mockery in the USA, as well as the sexual scandals. See John 12:2; Heb. 13:5; Titus 1:8.

## VERSES 4 and 5

conducting his own house well, having [his] children in subjection with all gravity; (but if one does not know how to conduct his own house, how shall he take care of the assembly of God?)

... having believing children not accused of excess or unruly (Titus 1:7).

This case refers to a man with children at home -- his own house. When children are grown they become married and have their own household. These do not mean that a man must cease oversight in that case. There are those who, utilizing such facts, along with others, contend that a man never married may be an elder. What we learn here is that the home sphere is the training sphere for this "good work."<sup>44</sup> There is a principle involved in this. The

44. The way to support the notion that a man who never married may be an overseer is seen in the following comments of C. F. Hogg (Open Brethren):

Under certain circumstances he [Paul] counsels celibacy; would those who accepted his advice be thereby disqualified for "taking care of a Church of God?" (1 Cor. 7:26).

Verse 8 seems to indicate that the writer himself was unmarried, yet he, too, took care of the churches (see 2 Cor. 11:28).

Observe that regarding an elder he wrote "taking care of *a* church of God," and then to gain support for his notion he cites Paul's case as "took care of the churches." An elder did not take care of churches; his was a local office. Paul's case does not serve his purpose, but rather the opposite. There was a responsibility that Paul had which might well have been an expression of the gift of rule, as well as the apostleship. 2 Cor. 11:28 does not refer to the function of an elder. Moreover, J. N. Darby has an instructive footnote in his translation to this verse where rather than using the word "care," he uses "the burden of all the assemblies";

'Burden here means any solicitude or anxiety, but 'care' misleads, because it conveys the idea of taking care of, which is not the sense. Same word as 'anxious care.' Matt. 13:22, and 'care,' 1 Pet. 5:7.

That C. F. Hogg had an unscriptural agenda regarding elders becomes clear as he proceeded to support his notion with more irrelevancies:

If the unmarried man is disqualified for the care of the flock it is difficult to account for the Apostle's words: "He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32).

The point is not about an unmarried man -- such as a widower who had ruled his own house well. It is about a never-married man. Besides this shift in the issue, the writer has again cited a text that is not germane to the issue. Why not even use the verse to support the notion that overseers would be better if they had never married? -- because the unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord. Pressing such texts to his use is really a sign of an unscriptural agenda.

(continued...)

principle of first being proved is seen regarding the instructions concerning deacons: "And let these be first proved, then let them minister" [serve] (1 Tim. 3:10). The overseer will have had, or does have, a well-conducted household. He will have had, or does have, children at home, in subjection -- with all gravity. He has a firm hand attached to a loving heart; a hand to caress, so to speak, and a hand to restrain, expressive of that heart of love for those in his home -- and then in the assembly. A loving heart seeks the good of its objects and will sacrifice one's own convenience for the nurturing of the household, and so of the assembly also. But this is a heart that has been tested in the circumstances of a family.

A man brings to difficulties his own habits from home. For example, there was a case of a rather unruly young person, whose tongue (naturally) shared in the wilfulness. I was favored with attention from this tongue and others began to observe this. It came to the point where another suggested that perhaps some restraint or rebuke was in order. There was not wanting one who objected, saying, "Why? What was done?" There was, in his view, really nothing to it. Perhaps the fact that his own children were wilful (nor did he believe in spanking them) had some bearing? (And, sad to say, the mother *begged* these children with "please, please, please," to do so and so). He saw no problem with the case. He did not know how to conduct his own house, but he thought he knew how to conduct the assembly of God -- and was not ashamed to intrude his opinion. His children got into disobedient ways.

(...continued)

His next text is Matt. 19:12 for which he offers a rhetorical question:

Are these persons, who, He tells us, are exceptional, thereby disqualified from exercising the oversight?"

J. N. Darby was one, who on mutual agreement with Lady Powerscourt, terminated an engagement to be married. He was just such an one as the Lord spoke of, and this servant wrote the words that appear at the very beginning of this chapter.

C. F. Hogg's final point is to call attention to the fact that he knew, or knew of, unmarried men (never-married) who cared diligently for the flock, and that this does

... confirm the judgment that *the words of 1 Tim. 3:2 will not bear the meaning that would exclude unmarried men from taking their share in church responsibilities.*

Is it wise to appeal to a practice to justify a doctrine? Pentecostals and Charismatics engage in this all the time.

The editor of the periodical quoted added this remark to clinch the matter:

It has been pointed out that if a man could not be an elder unless he had "one wife," neither could he be one if he had no children (v. 4) (*The Witness* 64:255).

We have observed that "husband of one wife" has polygamy in view; not that a widower could not be an elder. It is not a command that only a man who is married at the moment could exercise oversight. Moreover, the reference to children does not mean that after they are all in there own houses, the father could no longer be an overseer. What is it that raises all this discussion? It is that an agenda **will** be supported if the Scripture does not block it by dealing with every possible variant of minds set on an agenda. Scripture is written such that subjection of mind and will is required to profit from it.

Yes, an overseer has, or ought to have had, "children in subjection with all gravity."

W. Kelly remarked:

Again take the case of a man who had children brought up badly. Perhaps this neglect may have been before he was converted; perhaps after conversion he may have entertained the evil notion of leaving the children to themselves on the faithless plea that God, if He saw fit, would convert them some time or other. Such mistakes have been made, and miserable have been the results. Whatever the cause of an unruly house, its head could not be a bishop. . . .<sup>45</sup>

It is often observed that the wife is not mentioned here whereas the deacon's wife is (1 Tim. 3:11). J. N. Darby remarked:

Bishops had a charge in which they were occupied with souls and exercised authority in the church, in which women were not to act. Deacons were necessarily occupied with family details and circumstances. In these women might well be concerned and often very useful. In the spiritual care of elders they had nothing to do. It was requisite therefore that the wives of deacons should possess qualities which would cause their husbands to be respected, and at the same time guard themselves from becoming busybodies and talebearers.<sup>46</sup>

While acknowledging that the deacon's wife, in assisting him directly, might come upon more fuel for the "tongue [is] fire" (James 3:6), it will not help an elder either, if his wife is a busybody and/or a talebearer; or help any man, for that matter. If an elder's, or deacon's, wife carried on in that way, would that indicate that these brothers conduct their houses well? Does that promote in children the "subjection with all gravity"? (1 Tim. 3:4). A woman has a profound influence upon the children -- and well it is if she is a Hannah (1 Sam. 1, 2). Much work falls upon the wife also in connection with hospitality. There are numerous ways in which a godly wife contributes and God takes note of all.

## VERSE 6

not a novice, that he may not, being inflated, fall into [the] fault<sup>47</sup> of the devil.

A novice means one newly come to the faith. It might be a man of seventy years age, one who had even reared 'respectable' children, having required obedience at home. No matter, he is a novice. The Lord would have us in a path of subjection to His holy will for some time, that we might learn something of what self is, and what He is in spite of that. I suppose that the fault of the devil refers to Ezekiel 28:11-19 where the covering cherub, attendant upon the holiness of the throne, found even that great position insufficient for his imagined abilities and self-importance. It would appear that he had been at the pinnacle of rule in the hierarchy of the angelic beings. How apt we all are to

45. *Lectures on the Church of God*, pp. 194, 195.

46. *Synopsis* 5, 109, 110.

47. A footnote to this word in J. N. Darby's translation reads:

*Krima* is the subject matter of which a person had to be accused. They set up the *krima* of the Lord on the cross; that for which He came into accusation -- the charge. So it is used here. The devil was puffed up with his own excellency, and abode not in the truth. Hence, in a strongly taken sense, our word 'crime.' See also Note on 1 Cor. 11:29.

fall by inflation, perhaps more so when we have not learned much of what self is. Some seem to think that one learns more about what sin is in the gutter; but the truth is that we learn what sin is in the presence of God, a place equally accessible to all, that we all might learn what we are, and what God is for us.

## VERSE 7

But it is necessary that he should have also a good testimony from those without, that he may fall not into reproach and [the] snare of the devil.

The saints are 'read' by the world (2 Cor. 3:2, 3), a sphere where the saints are to show honesty (Rom. 12:17). Paul gave himself as an example of carefulness for the gospel's sake (1 Cor. 10:33). Hypocrisy will bring a Christian into reproach from those without, even where it is tolerated in a worldling. So with cheating and lying, and such like things, which ensnares on by the devil. The fault of the devil (v. 6) refers to the judgment of the devil, while here we have a warning against providing him an opportunity to ensnare us in evil ways.

## ***Titus 1:6-9: Qualifications for the Overseer***

(by W. Kelly)

Moral qualities and circumstances in accordance with them are here as elsewhere insisted on for elders. "If any one is blameless (or unaccused)." How censure others, if open to it himself? "Husband of one wife." If married, he must have but one wife; for many heathen had several and at one time; and Jews discarded a wife with facility when they liked another more. "Having children faithful, not under charge of excess (or profligacy), or unruly." Next to personal probity stands family relationship; and as plurality of wives would bar, whatever the suitability in other respects, so a disreputable offspring. How could he rule the house of God, who had already and manifestly failed in his own home? . . .

The elder is expressive of the dignity of the person derived from the respect due to age; not that the elder must needs be an aged man, but one of experience. Thus the title was derived and applied even if there was no great age, where suitability for the position existed. The bishop, or overseer, expresses rather the nature of the office, which was to take account morally of the saints, and to maintain godly order. Oversight in short was the constant duty privately and publicly.

Hence it was a primary requisite that the overseer should himself be blameless, or free from charge against him, as God's steward. He had a governing post, and a moral responsibility therein to God. The apostle in 1 Cor. 4:1 speaks of himself and of his fellow-laborers as "stewards of God's mysteries." Here we find no mysteries referred to. These were not the sacraments so called, but the new and hitherto secret truths of the New Testament revelation. Yet the elder, or overseer, might not be a teacher; still less did he stand in the higher place of apostle or prophet. Nevertheless he must

be "apt to teach," as we shall see confirmed ere long in this very context, though not possessed of the teacher's distinct gift. But whatever his duty, he must act as God's steward, manifestly identified with the interests of His house. This would give seriousness of purpose, as it supposes moral courage with men and dependence on God and His word.

He must be "not self-willed," or headstrong. It is the grossest mistake that self-will implies courage, though it may lead to rashness or even recklessness. Nothing gives so much quiet firmness as the consciousness of doing the will of God. One can then be lowly and patient, but uncompromising. Again, he must be "not soon angry" or passionate. Scarce anything enfeebles authority more than proneness to the explosions of anger. The weight of a rebuke, however just it might be, is apt to be lost when a man is overcome with passion. Calmness gives weight and force to a needed rebuke.

The next negation is perhaps a figurative expression; literally it means not abiding long over wine or disorderly through it. Hence it comes generally to mean, "not a brawler." Even were a Christian free from the suspicion of so evil a source, the easily heated character is unfit to be, and unworthy of being, God's steward. The overseer must be no brawler.

If this refers rather to spirit and words, the next goes further down; he is to be "no striker." Here there is a still less seemly violence, the one very naturally leading to the other. The overseer must be neither.

There is another characteristic which men in authority are not a little apt to fall into, but it is not to be in an overseer -- he must not seek gain by base means, he must not yield to greed of filthy lucre. He who is called to rule before God among the saints must himself watch at least as much against this debasing evil as against those of violence.

How blessed the contrast with all these uncomely traits we see in Christ! And if every Christian is called to be Christ's epistle, how much more are the elders? How could one, known to fail or tamper with any of these things, reprove the failure of others as he ought?

The absence of evil qualities is not enough. The assembly of God is the only sphere on earth for the exercise and display of that which is divine. To steer clear, therefore, of the ordinary snares of men in office never could satisfy the mind of God. The overseer, without a thought of invitation or recompense in return, was called to be hospitable, and we know from other scriptures that this was not to be exercised after the manner of men but according to faith. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews the saints in general were called not to be forgetful of hospitality, for by it some have entertained angels unawares. It was not, therefore on the ground of previous knowledge, or of social equality. Had there been suspicion of a stranger, assuredly it would have excluded all such entertainment. So in faith and love Abraham received into hospitality, not angels only, but the Lord God Himself, in the form of man. Hospitality like this was not to be laid on the shelf, or vainly admired as a patriarchal virtue. Beyond question the overseer was not to be behind the saints in general, but to be given to hospitality. Nor this only, but "a lover of good," not merely of good men, but of goodness -- an important guard in the exercise of much more than

hospitality. Self-pleasing might readily enter otherwise; and the indulgence of self ever is the service of Satan. Christ alone shows us truly and fully what good is, and makes it not only attractive but of power for the spirit and the walk. The overseer therefore was to be a "lover of good."

Further, he was to be discreet or sober-minded. A man might easily carry the love of good into either a sentiment or an enthusiasm; but the Spirit of God gives sobriety. He is "a Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind." Thus is everything kept in its true place, because all is seen and weighed in the presence of God.

Hence the overseer was to be "just"; he must rightly estimate the relationship of others and his own: a most important element, not merely in a general way, but especially for one in his place. Nothing would more enfeeble his weight than a failure in righteousness. Yet to be "just" is not enough. It is of course imperative; but there must be more along with it. The overseer must be "pious," "holy" in that sense, "ὁσίοις." It is not separate from evil, but gracious and upright, and is so used particularly of Christ in the Old Testament, as well as the New. It is that character of piety which appreciates God's mercy, and is itself merciful. This was looked for in an elder, while he and all believers were ἅγιοι or saints. Further, he was to be "temperate, an expression much narrowed and so far misapplied in our day. Self-control not in one respect but in all is its real meaning.

These are the moral qualities which the Spirit of God insists on for elders, positively as well as negatively. But there is an addition of great value in v. 9, "Holding to the faithful word according to the teaching, that he may be able both to encourage (or exhort) in sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers."

Here the necessary aptness to teach appears in the peculiar and twofold obligation for which it was required. It might not be formal ministry in the assembly; the work of the elder lay as much, or perhaps even more, with the wants and dangers of individual saints in daily life. Such an one must adhere firmly to the faithful word. Uncertainty in his own perception of it, uncertainty in his handling it for others, would altogether undermine the task laid on him to execute. The elder was not however to act according to his own wisdom; nor did his authority spring from himself, any more than from those that composed the assembly. He was God's steward, and the Holy Ghost made him an overseer, not in a mere flock of his own, "my people," as men say, but "in the flock of God." The faithful word, therefore, must be his standard, as well as the source from which he drew whatever material he used; and this not to nourish questions or indulge imagination, "but according to truth and love." If he was a man in authority, so was he a man under authority. He was God's steward, that God's will might be done and the will of man repressed. God is not the author of confusion but of peace, Who will have all things done decently and in order. Thus the light of the faithful word must guide the elder and indeed the Christian. The teaching he was himself taught can alone determine what that order is; and now it is permanently in scripture. To that faithful word of God, therefore, the overseer must cling, avoiding strange notions as poison. Nor was it for his own guidance only. The elders were to rule, and, as made such by the Holy Spirit, were solemnly responsible to "rule well." But if such were to be



accounted worthy of double honor, it was especially true of those who labored in the word and in teaching (1 Tim. 5:17), as some might if not all.

Now in the conflict of circumstances which would come necessarily before the overseer, there are two wants constantly claiming his care -- as well the need to encourage some, as no less the need to reprove gainsayers. Hence says the apostle in this passage, "That he may be able both to exhort (or comfort) with sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers. For both a single eye is needed; but the faithful word is the means or weapon of all moment, sharper than any two-edged sword, which can divide as well as wound. On the overseer would fall this duty from time to time, and the faithful word alone would enable him both to encourage with sound doctrine and to expose those who sought their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ."<sup>48</sup>

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48. *The Bible Treasury* 17:57, 76-77.

## Chapter 2.8

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### *Care Meetings*

A meeting of those who addict themselves to the ministry of the saints may rightly consult and decide on matters which concern the Lord's work and the saints, save in such cases as reception or excision, where according to scripture the assembly as such is called to act. But I know nothing of a meeting even of elders which could be said to represent the assembly. There is individual action, joint action, and that of the assembly: each true, and important, and sanctioned of the Lord; but one does not represent another. The assembly is itself and supposes the place of all, brothers and sisters, with the Spirit freely acting in their midst to maintain the glory and will of the Lord. But a meeting of chief men among the brethren is of great value, substantially of the elderhood in principle if not so now in name; for it is mischievous to be ever occupying the assembly with questions, the natural result of men who wish to set the assembly against ministry, and so naturally use it for their own self-importance. But no individuals, however gifted, can act *for* the assembly, though they may be helpful to the assembly in enabling them to judge before the Lord, and they may morally represent the assembly to the Lord's eye for praise or blame. In general, too, cases of evil, which are rightly brought before all, are so plain as to leave no hesitation. Still there are seasons when the assembly might demand more time or evidence before the extreme act of putting away; nor ought the assembly to be hurried into hasty measures, by individuals, whose sole remedy for all evil (the strongest point of their own lack of wisdom and power) is exclusion. In every instance the assembly should weigh seriously and calmly, but in the sense of its own responsibility to the Lord, not at all as the mere executive of elders or chief men, who are liable to infirmity of various kinds; it has the presence of the Lord to count on in a way quite peculiar and is subject directly to Him alone. The question of acting forthwith or not depends entirely on the nature of the case; it should never degenerate into a venture but be the fruit of conscientious judgment in liberty before God. To act simply on the judgment of a supposed representative would be Presbyterian, not as God's church; to act only for itself would be congregational. It is God's church; and in the present ruin the Lord graciously attaches the same validity even to "two or three" gathered to His name. If representation comes in rightly, it is here; in a certain sense the local assembly represents the church everywhere; and the church everywhere, in all ordinary cases, acts on the judgment of the local assembly. It is the presence of the Lord in their midst which gives it such weight. Church action otherwise is human.<sup>49</sup>

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49. *The Bible Treasury* 9:320.

I believe your practice to be a right one, as to the gathering together of those who care for the Church of God to look into cases of discipline, and of those seeking fellowship, cases of need, and the various matters in which godly care and oversight is needed.

In scripture I find that there was a *body* technically called the elderhood, or presbytery within the assembly. No doubt, in apostolic days, those composing this body may have been [were] appointed by apostles, or their representatives; but still their was a recognized *body* -- not merely men or elders individually, who acted in concert; but a body so named. See 1 Tim. 4:14.<sup>50</sup> Such a body was known amongst the Jews. See Luke 22:26. "The elderhood of the people," "The estate of the elders," Acts 22:5; both having the same meaning as elderhood or presbytery, while, of course, differing in constitution.

I believe there is a great deal done by such meetings now, composed of those who have a care for the church, and who possess the confidence of the saints, and an aptitude for such care. Many cases, details of which would be hurtful if spoken of before the young, and females, have there been discussed before the Lord; the case carefully examined on all sides, and while no action of discipline or reception is taken, or could be, apart from the assembled saints, still the case is matured, and so brought forward, in a way that delicacy is not shocked, where such a case might exist.

It may turn out, too, that many a case need go no further; the personal rebuke of the "spiritual." The interference of the two or three may save all this, and save the Lord's name from reproach, as well as the Assembly from that most painful of all actions -- the exercise of discipline and excision from its midst. Cases, too, of need, where that can be ministered to, with the quiet grace of the Lord, are saved from a parade and the like.

"Sisters" have nothing whatever to do with such meeting. They have their place defined fully in scripture, and are not to exercise authority. But no action, I repeat, can be taken by such a meeting apart from the assembled saints.

The cases are looked into, and the Assembly -- having confidence in those who thus love the care of the Church -- receive their testimony, and act upon their evidence and wisdom, and the matter, requiring only adequate testimony from two or three faithful witnesses as to the true bearing of the case.<sup>51</sup>

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50. { As for the notion that τοῦ πρεσβυτερίου (1 Tim. 4:14) means not the elders as a body but eldership, and so is to be in sense dislocated from its evident and necessary connection with χεῖρῶν at the end of the verse and put in apposition with χάρισματος at the beginning, I maintain that the grammar is not more harsh and unexampled than the resulting doctrine is strange. Eldership in scripture is not a gift but a local charge (W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Church of God*, p. 222.) }

51. *Words of Truth* 6:58.

## ***Chapter 2.9***

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### ***The Charge to Timothy and The Duration of the Church***

(Extract from a letter by J. N. Darby)

As to history, we have the fact that the apostles, not incidentally, not invited on account of their wisdom and their gifts, but led by the Spirit of God, of their own act, return to the churches which they had rounded and choose (this is the word) elders for them; and that with deliberate intent the apostle Paul left Titus in Crete to establish them (not incidentally, not by private invitation, but of his own act) in *every town*, as he himself had done in Asia Minor.

Next, we have several epistles addressed to the churches which treat of all the subjects of interest to Christians, which speak with special detail of the internal order of a church where the need of superintendence was painfully felt; but never a word, an insinuation, a supposition, that churches themselves had to do with the ordination of elders; they were to be in submission to their spiritual guides; but that they were to appoint them, or to ordain them, does not for an instant enter into the thought of the Spirit. On the other hand we have quite confidential epistles to the delegates of the apostle, one of which is addressed to him whom he had left at Crete expressly to establish elders, and in which directions with regard to the proper qualifications for this office abound.

And permit me, sir, to tell you here that, when you say that it is a question of a ceremony, not of choice and discernment, you contradict the meaning of the passage. The apostle does not detail all the qualifications necessary to a bishop for a ceremony, but in order that choice may be made with discernment. When it is said "Lay hands suddenly on no man," it is a matter of discernment, of choice, and not a simple ceremony. I confess that I find it wearisome to reply to such arguments -- I am wrong -- to such assertions, which one grain of common sense suffices to condemn. The historical facts then, which are clear and positive, the complete silence maintained in the epistles to the churches on this subject, the large development on this point given in the confidential letters addressed by the apostle to his delegates, to one of whom the establishment of elders was specially confided, all this demonstrates clearly enough and incontestably what has in fact taken place, and the thought of the Spirit in this respect. The apostle chose, or his delegates chose in his stead, it is to these that the Spirit confides all the necessary instructions for doing it rightly and never to the churches.

What is the reply made to these positive facts? to these most clear precepts? A sentence is taken in the confidential letter to Timothy, in which it says, after

having spoken of several points, "These things write I unto thee . . . that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God." This is said to be a command for all Christians to ordain elders. The apostle had left Timothy at Ephesus to watch over the church during his absence and particularly with regard to doctrine. He hoped to return soon, but he desired that Timothy should be instructed so as to know how to act suitably during his absence. He speaks of the doctrine of grace in contrast with law; then, this grace being addressed to all, how they ought to pray for all; that men were to do so in such and such a manner; that women, on their part, were to pursue such and such a course of conduct. Then he says, "If a man desire the office of a bishop," he must have such and such qualifications, his wife must be such and such; so with the deacons; and at the end of all this he says, "I tell thee these things that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself." Here is all that can be found in the way of command, positive command, to all Christians to choose for themselves elders in spite of all that is found in the word. A pope (and the apostle had the authority which the pope assumes) writes to a bishop to point out what are the qualifications necessary for a priest, and, as he watches over the whole Church, he instructs him in the order to be followed, and finally he says, "I write to thee, bishop, so that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave in the Church" -- and this is a command to all the faithful to appoint priests, without bishops or a pope, or any other authority in the Church! But one must have lost common sense to reason in this manner. And you are conscious of it, sir, for you say after all, "the apostles, who found an institution, impose on us by that very fact the command to preserve or to restore it." If there were a positive command in the Epistle to Timothy, there would be no need of this remark. Why say "by that very fact," if it is a universal and positive command to all Christians?

Founding an institution does not necessarily imply a command to restore it, because it is possible for an institution to depend on the authority of the founder, and it may be impossible to restore it. An emperor appoints his son as viceroy, and he sends him instructions with regard to the appointment of magistrates, saying to him, "I write these things to thee that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave in the kingdom": is it a proof that everyone should make magistrates for himself, each in his little coterie, on his own authority, although the emperor might still be living? How often must one expose the futility of such arguments? You say that the apostle alters his language in saying how one should behave. It is not so. He does not change his language suddenly here; it does not alter at all in the sense which you indicate; he had already used the same terms before, but there is a change which you have not remarked. He speaks of the duties and behavior to be maintained by ordinary Christians; men were to pray, women were to dress themselves modestly, etc. Now in this case he speaks about the duties of all. I desire that men do so and so, and likewise that the women, etc. But when he comes to the question of bishops, which was not the duty of all, he no longer says a word about the duties of Christians in general with regard to this. Here he suddenly changes his language and indicates to Timothy alone the necessary qualifications, and the reasons why they were to be required; having previously applied his words to all, because it was a question of the conduct of all, he suddenly changes his language when he begins to speak of bishops, and says not another word of the

duty of Christians; but he ends his remark not by saying, "I write so that the faithful, or I wish that the faithful, should know how they ought to behave," as he had said previously; but "I write that thou mayest know." There is a change. Before speaking of bishops, he said that he wished that all should act so and so. As soon as he speaks of bishops, he ceases to do so and addresses himself to Timothy personally and individually.

The thing is very simple. When the apostle gives directions to Timothy with reference to the conduct which he should cause Christians to maintain, every Christian will understand that it is a command for himself concerning the conduct that he ought to follow. When he speaks to Timothy as to an authority in the Church of his conduct as such, this is certainly a command, but office and authority are not attributed where they are not possessed. A direction given to a person in an important office for his conduct in that office, is a command like any other, but to apply it to oneself as if it were addressed to one when one has not the office, is an application which is neither just nor modest.

It is a denial of the distinction of ministry. If directions and exhortations are given to those who exercise any ministry whatsoever with reference to their ministry, are the force and authority of the directions denied, because (not having the ministry) they are not applicable to oneself? or are such exhortations commands which order all to create ministry when it is no longer possessed? The apostle gives directions for the use of tongues and of gifts of interpretation. Is his authority rejected because it is no longer applicable to them? Do those commands oblige you to restore what has been lost, as the Irvingites have pretended to do? The difference lies only in this: one may imitate elders and boast of doing so, whereas the imitation of tongues only gives occasion for ridicule. After all, there have been and there still are more persons carried away by the pretension to the gift of tongues, than by the reappointment of elders. You say, "The rules which the apostle addressed to Corinth being commands for every church, the rules which he addressed to Timothy are also commands for every epoch." Yes, you feel the weakness of your cause. Why this change of "churches" into epochs? The thing is that the Epistle to Timothy was not addressed to any church. The rules addressed to Corinth concerning tongues are they for every epoch? Yes, you say. I also say Yes, if tongues exist. When there are none, these rules cannot be applied, and this does not affect the authority of the word. The rules given to Timothy with regard to his own behavior as delegate are applicable to every epoch if there is a Timothy. The rules addressed to Corinth were for every church: be it so. The rules addressed to Timothy were -- let us say, without altering anything -- for every church: you have not dared to say it. They were in a great measure directions given to a man invested with a special office concerning his behavior in this office, a light for all, because he was to watch over the conduct of all and so all are referred to in the epistle. But it is not true that the epistle was addressed to all the churches: to affirm this would be to deny a special ministry, to destroy it in its most important parts. If the letter was not addressed to the churches of that time, and if they could not use it with intelligence, i.e., without acknowledging the special position of Timothy, it is the same now. The Church uses these epistles, but it uses them as having been addressed to a Timothy and not directly to the churches themselves.

Your second point is "Then he maintains that these instructions do not organize offices excepting for the duration of the life of the apostles and their delegates." I have, in fact, answered this assertion. The apostle does not say anything either for or against as to the duration of its organization. He does his duty in the work which God entrusted to him and he leaves the rest to God. As a prophet he announced that it would go on growing worse, and that the mystery was already developing itself. That which he said has been, and still is, being accomplished. What I say is, that the organization has certainly not lasted. You dare not contradict me without giving the lie to the whole of history. The instructions are not occupied with the duration. They give the qualifications suitable to a bishop, nothing else, neither more nor less. What I have said is an incontestable historical fact. God in His wisdom has not spoken in a way to allow Himself to be belied by facts. But, moreover, you think that God has put before us in the word the prospect of a long duration of the Church, for which He should provide an organization. You say it, sir, but the word of God does not speak thus. Quite the contrary. You speak of the whole future of the Church, as if God had proclaimed it, and as if He had prepared everything for a long future on earth. There is nothing of this. The Church is called on high. The word presents the coming of Jesus as the hope of the Church, and teaches the Church always to expect Him. The thought of the long duration was that of the *unfaithful servant* "My lord delayeth his coming"; this is what causes him to unite with the world and to usurp authority over the other servants. The idea on which all your system, all your arguments, are founded, is a guilty one. The Bridegroom has, in truth, delayed His coming; the wise and foolish virgins have surely slept. Perhaps you think that they have done well to sleep. It has been said to me, in order to show that the Church had not failed, that there was no occasion to blame them for sleeping. Perhaps you think that the mystery of iniquity has worked without the Church having failed, that all forsook Paul, that all sought their own interests, without its having been sin. I have already said, sir, that I have no pretension to make you feel anything whatever with regard to this. But here is what is certain. Such has been the conduct of the Church. The word of God does not speak of a long future for the Church, but of the unfaithfulness of the servant who expected it. The organization established by the apostle did not last more than thirty years after his death. He foresaw and predicted the general ruin of his work as a testimony set up on the earth; he even felt it before his death. I leave it for you and everyone to say if there has been sin in what has taken place.<sup>52</sup>

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52. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:360-365.

## Chapter 2.10

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### ***The History of Eldership in Christendom***

***(from a review of Dr. Lightfoot on  
the Christian Ministry)*** <sup>53</sup>

This is a dissertation of 86 pages on the christian ministry, appended to a revised text and comment on the Epistle to the Philippians.

It is an industrious and sufficiently exhaustive treatise on the origin and progress of episcopacy. Dr. L. repeatedly demurs at the office considered uniquely, much more at the order of bishops being found in the word of God.

He derives it, as most modern authors do, from a presidency -- a *primus inter pares* <sup>54</sup> -- originally and perhaps necessarily given by the presbytery itself to some one of its members, which afterwards developed itself first into office of a bishop, then into the right of ordination, eventually into sacerdotalism, in which form it at present exists. As this is an important question of the day, we shall briefly pursue the line, not of argument, but of history, followed by the author, and state wherein we think he fails as to his acceptance of the office or order in its present circumstances, and as to a real discrimination of what true ministry is.

Not only do we need no better witness than Dr. Lightfoot for the fact that episcopacy as an order, distinct in itself from the presbytery, is not of God; also we could not have a more explicit testimony, as to the time at which the change was made. It was between the closing of the canon of scripture, and the period in the writings of the early christian fathers, namely, from about the year A. D. 70 to the beginning or middle of the second century. Let us hear what Dr. L. says on the subject.

History seems to show decisively that before the middle of the second century, each church or organized christian community had its three orders of ministers, its bishops, its presbyters, and its deacons (page 184).

Again,

As late therefore as the year 70, no distinct signs of episcopal government have hitherto appeared in Gentile Christendom. Yet unless we have recourse to a sweeping condemnation of received documents, it seems vain to deny that early in the second century, the episcopal office was firmly and widely established.

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53. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* by J. B. Lightfoot, D. D., 3rd edition, 1873.

54. [i.e., *first among equals*.]



Thus during the last three decades of the first century, and consequently during the lifetime of the latest surviving apostle, this change must have been brought about (page 199).

Again:

Nor does it appear that the rise of episcopacy was so sudden and so immediate, that an authoritative order issuing from an apostolic council alone can explain the phenomenon. In the mysterious period which comprises the last thirty years of the first century, and on which history is almost silent, episcopacy must, it is true, have been mainly developed (pages 203-204).

Once more:

In this way, during the historical blank which extends over half a century after the fall of Jerusalem, episcopacy was matured, and the catholic church consolidated (page 205).

Nothing more need be added to these extracts to show that, when church history opened, a departure had already taken place from scriptural order. "The bishops [or presbyters] and deacons" of Philippians 1:1, and the elders or presbyters of Peter (1 Peter 5:1-3) which was the apostolic order, had changed into bishops, presbyters, and deacons. However lightly, as will be seen farther on, Dr. L. may think of this change, to our mind it exhibits a grievous departure from scripture truth.

Two circumstances appear to satisfy Dr. L. or to reconcile him to the change. The first is that he thinks James the Lord's brother to have been a Bishop

in the later and more special sense of the term (page 195)

Again:

The church of Jerusalem, as I have already pointed out, presents the earliest instance of a bishop. A certain official prominence is assigned to James the Lord's brother, both in the Epistles of St. Paul, and in the Acts of the Apostles. And the inference drawn from the notices on the canonical scriptures is borne out by the tradition of the next ages. As early as the middle of the second century all parties concurred in representing him as a bishop in the strict sense of the term.

Again:

Hegesippus who is our authority for this statement (namely that Symeon was appointed in his place) distinctly regards Symeon as holding the same office with James and no less distinctly calls him a bishop (page 106).

This occurred of course in the church at Jerusalem. As to the rise of the office among the Gentiles, he supposes that it took place in Asia Minor under the auspices of the Apostle John. Thus he writes:

Above all these notices establish this result clearly, that its maturer forms are seen first in those regions where the latest surviving apostles (more especially St. John) fixed their abode, and at a time when its prevalence cannot be dissociated from their influence or their sanction.

Without a trace of it in his writings, nay, with much in them against such a

supposition, it is thus traditionally affirmed that John the apostle had a hand in the establishment of episcopacy. This is serious, because it connects tradition with an apostle, and throws us off his inspired writings, in which latter alone we ought to find an unerring guide. It is thus that Dr. L. evidently connects himself with an apostolic succession. We must again allow him to speak for himself.

Here we find (that is, in Asia Minor) the widest and most unequivocal traces of episcopacy at an early date. Clement of Alexandria distinctly states that John went about from city to city, his purpose being 'in some places to establish bishops, in others to consolidate whole churches, in others again to appoint to the clerical office some one of those who had been signified by the Spirit;' and much more to this effect from the works of those fathers who had notoriously imbibed episcopacy, their writings being full of the subject.

Now if James and John be thus brought in as sanctioning episcopacy, is it not well with a view to check such assertions to examine their writings? Do they verify such a statement as the following?

Nor again is Rothe probably wrong as to the authority mainly instrumental in affecting the change. Asia Minor was the adopted home of more than one apostle after the fall of Jerusalem. Asia Minor too was the nurse, if not the mother, of episcopacy in the Gentile churches. So important an institution, developed in a Christian community of which St. John was the living center and guide, could hardly have grown up without his sanction: and, as will be presently seen, early tradition very distinctly connects his name with the appointment of bishops in these parts (page 204).

Once more:

We have seen that the needs of the church and the ascendancy of his personal character placed St. James at the head of the Christian brotherhood in Jerusalem. Though remaining a member of the presbyterial council, he was singled out from the rest, and placed in a position of superior responsibility. His exact power it is impossible, and it is unnecessary, to define. When therefore after the fall of the city, St. John with the surviving apostles removed to Asia Minor, and found there manifold irregularities, and threatening symptoms of disruption, he would not unnaturally encourage an approach in these Gentile churches to the same organization, which had been signally blessed, and proved effectual in holding together the mother church amid dangers not less serious. The existence of a council or college necessarily supposes presidency of some kind, whether this presidency be assumed by each member in turn, or lodged in the hands of a single person. It was only necessary therefore for him to give permanence, definiteness, stability, to an office which already existed in germ. There is no reason however for supposing that any direct ordinance was issued to the churches. The evident utility and ever pressing need of such an office, sanctioned by the most venerated name in Christendom, would be sufficient to secure its wide though gradual reception (page 205).

But let us see whether in the Epistles of James or of John a trace can be found that, if they remained true to their writings, such an event could have occurred under their auspices.

We willingly admit at Jerusalem the salient position which James (whether an apostle or not) occupied. Paul alludes to this, when in Galatians he associates him with Peter and John. "And when James, Cephas, and John who

seemed to be pillars," and still more so when he says of Peter, "For before that certain came from James he did eat with the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:9-12); but when we look at James's writings, he calls himself simply "a servant of God," and throughout his Epistle remarkably seeks to connect the souls of those he addresses with God Himself, not at all through any bishop; and on the only occasion in which he makes any allusion to church officers, he desires the sick to send "for the elders of the church." It is plain that by this recommendation he owned a body of elders in any or every church; in other words a body of bishops, for we learn their identity<sup>55</sup> by a comparison of Titus 1:5 with verse 7, and of Acts 20:17 compared with verse 28, to say nothing of other passages used quite fairly by Dr. L.

Whatever prominence therefore James had, it was not by way of establishing a new office, still less a new order, for himself; however this may have been done for him by others after his death.

In the Epistles of John nothing is more significant than the way in which those to whom he writes are made personally responsible for the truth. They are to "try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). They were to be on their guard. "Little children, let no man deceive you" (1 John 3:7). Again, "Little children it is the last time, and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby ye know that it is the last time." John wrote these testing Epistles as owning the last time. He did not hint at any apostolic or episcopal succession, to whom the case or conduct of any person was to be relegated. Moreover, if upon the one hand there were the many antichrists, upon the other he could say, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One and know all things" (1 John 2:18-20). They were not left without abundant provision.

In his second Epistle he more fully owns, and that to a lady, the fallen condition of things -- "many deceivers are entered into the world" -- and says, "Look to yourselves [not to a bishop] that ye lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." In the third Epistle (to Gaius), he informs him that he had written to the church, but that "Diotrophes who loveth to have the preeminence among them receiveth us not" (3 John 9). It is clear that every evil principle was at work in apostolic days, and with the example of Diotrephes before him, he is not likely to have given his sanction to a supposed successor, more especially when full directions were given to the saints in this state of things. Is it likely after this that, according to Dr. L., he should have sanctioned, not a *primus inter pares*, not a president of a board of elders, but an established bishop of an order superior to the presbyters?

But here a very interesting question meets us. It is well known that discrepancies exist as to the succession of the early bishops so-called, although plenty of lists are found. Dr. L. says, of those at Jerusalem, that Symeon follows James -- then,

The episcopate of Justus, the successor of Symeon, commences about A. D. 108; that of Marcus, the first Gentile bishop (of Jerusalem), A. D. 130. Thus thirteen

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55. [An elder and a bishop is, in reality, the same person.]

bishops occupy only about twenty-eight years (p. 206).

In like manner of the Roman bishops proper, it is observable although their occupancy of the see is not so short, yet their names are mingled together in a confused way, more especially the nearer they are to the fountain head. Thus they run -- Linus, Anencletus, Clemens, Evarestus, according to Irenaeus. Eusebius in different works gives two lists, both agreeing in the order with Irenaeus, though not agreeing with each other in the dates. Catalogues are also found in later writers, transposing the sequence of the earliest bishops, and adding the name Cletus, or substituting it for Anencletus. But although not instanced by Dr. L., Tertullian says,

As the church of the Smyrneans relates that Polycarp was placed there by John, so, in like manner, the church of the Romans relates that Clement was ordained by Peter,

so that here was confusion anew. How simple is the solution, if, in the discrepancies as to the position of the names at Rome, as well as in the suspicion attached to the shortness of the occupancies at Jerusalem, we recognize a presbytery with a chairman, whose place, when he was absent owing to other important calls, was filled by another, and reoccupied by him on his return!

We take leave of Dr. L. with one more notice. It does him credit that he does not force into his service the angels of the churches in Revelation 2, 3, as do too many of his contemporaries. We give his view of these angels, because it comes so near to what our judgment of them is.

Whether the angel is here conceived as an actual person, the celestial guardian, or only as a personification, the idea or spirit of the church, it is unnecessary for my present purpose to consider. But whatever may be the exact conception, he is identical with, and made responsible for it, to a degree wholly unsuited to any human officer . . . In one passage especially the language applied to the angel seems to exclude the common interpretation. In the message to Thyatira, the angel is blamed because he suffers himself to be led astray by his wife Jezebel. In this image of Ahab's idolatrous queen, some dangerous and immoral teaching must be personified; for it does violence alike to the general tenor, and to the individual expressions in the passage, to suppose that an actual woman is meant (p. 198).

But to conclude our notice, as far as Dr. L. is concerned. The steps alas! are easy from even the chairman of a body of presbyters to the functorial order of a bishop, thence, through the right of ordination to sacerdotalism, and onwards to the pope. Candor obliges us to say that Dr. L.'s easy acceptance of modern episcopacy is at variance with the premises he lays down of its irreconcilableness with scripture. But he contrives, unfairly as we think, to connect the names of James and John with it, but only in the latter case through the untrustworthy channel of tradition, and thus he satisfies himself. Always objecting, yet in the end he assents, and gives in his adhesion in the language which follows. The power of the bishops, as a question of practical importance, being the subject, he says:

Such a development involves no new principle, and must be regarded chiefly in its practical bearings. It is plainly competent for the church, at any given time,

to entrust a particular office with larger powers, as the emergency may require. And though the grounds on which the independent authority of the episcopate was at times defended may have been false or exaggerated, no reasonable objection can be taken to later forms of ecclesiastical polity because the measure of power accorded to the bishop does not remain exactly the same as in the church of the sub-apostolic ages. Nay, to many thoughtful and dispassionate minds even the gigantic power wielded by the popes during the middle ages will appear justifiable in itself (though they will repudiate the false pretensions on which it was founded, and the false opinions which were associated with it), since only by such a providential concentration of authority could the church, humanly speaking, have braved the storms of those ages of anarchy and violence (pp. 242, 243).

Is all this reasoning anything but a simple begging of the question? Has Dr. L. proved that the order of bishops, as one superior to presbyters, is found in scripture? If he has not found the order, how can it be "trusted with larger powers"? It is just this departure from the word of God -- this finding by tradition what cannot be found in scripture -- which has brought Christendom into its present position. If God has thought proper to lay down distinct landmarks in His word, what authority have we to depart from them? If the bishopric be an order superior to presbyters, why are there no administrative instructions given for its exercise? The end is that Dr. L. is obliged to condone the very office of the pope, productive as it was of a condition of Christendom during the middle ages far worse than that of heathenism. By giving the church an earthly head, we effectually shut out association with Christ as a heavenly one. Dr. L. thus derives his sanction to preach through the tradition that John the Apostle set up the first bishop, whence comes the pope, and also through him Dr. L.'s successional right? all the time, be it remembered, that the pope himself denies that the Anglican church has any succession at all. Upon what a slippery foundation does all this succession rest! Besides, is it not evident, from the farewell interview of Paul with the elders of Ephesus, narrated in Acts 20, that he looked for no succession? Did he not rather "commend them to God and to the word of his grace, which was able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them that were sanctified?"

A few remarks are yet needed as to a want in this treatise concerning the Christian ministry, or, in other words, early church government, for this is really the subject, and not Christian ministry, which latter is provided for, as will be shown, from Christ Himself on high. Placed upon their trial, we believe that Presbyterianism shows more proofs in its favor than Episcopacy [though it wholly fails in the vital point of valid power to choose or appoint, where Episcopacy is right theoretically in insisting on a superior authority].

But both sides, as now existing, equally develop the clerical orders, and both equally restrict ministerial office, properly speaking, to those who have been ordained by the laying on of hands. Surely, on the supposition that their ordination is lawful or necessary, there should still be room left for the manifestation of those gifts which are independent either of bishops or presbytery. "He gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers."

Here let us digress for a moment. The treatise of Dr. L. is at the least

valuable on this account, that it substantiates a point of departure, a "mysterious period," during which the action of the Holy Ghost, as "dividing to every man severally as he will," was set aside, and clerical order was set up. During the period between Paul's departure and the first Christian uninspired writer, a child might discover how deep the fall had been, so manifest is the difference between the canonical scriptures and such writings, not only in their feeble hold of positive truth, but in their determined, though often puerile and erroneous assertions. The fathers are indeed no safe guides. We have in measure to be thankful for this. The gulf is narrow, but very deep, between their writings and the scriptures. There is no possibility of adjusting the two. There is a clear line of separation between the scriptures and the earliest church writers; and as to the matter we have in hand, nowhere is it more distinctly seen than in the negation of the prerogatives of Christ, and of the person of the Holy Ghost, in the question of ministry. The error of all modern church history is, that ministry is confined to local officers. Be the system what it may, there are no connections in the way of ministry, properly speaking, with God or with Christ outside of this local channel.

But if we study the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, we find that there was a great deal of gift, and no eldership (that is, no local government); in fact, elders were made for the church, and not the church for elders. Minute directions are given by Paul as to the use of gifts (1 Cor. 14), and as to the observance of the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11); but there were apparently no elders, and everything was left to the church's own sense of divine suitabilities. We know, indeed, that there was failure, but the failure was not corrected by the creation of a bishop. Even Dr. L. seems to recognize that there is something besides local government, when he says:

The apostle, like the prophet or the evangelist, held no local office. He was essentially, as his name denotes, a missionary (p. 294).

If this be the case, where is now the evangelist? Do parochial arrangements allow of travelling evangelists, we might say of travelling curates? The truth is, that elders (that is, bishops), as well as deacons, are local. They were of apostolic appointment, chosen for an office, and may or may not have been gifts also; but such appointments offered no restraint to the free current of divine life in the assembly, as we see in the Epistle to the Philippians, nor to the divine prerogative of Christ, who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, not one of which are in themselves necessarily elders, "till we all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man," &c. It is this confusion between local office and gifts for the universal church, or body of Christ, which has been the fruitful source of apostasy, and the poisonous sap which has dwarfed the growth and spread of truth everywhere. It has eventuated in an earthly system, with the pope as chief, and has dethroned our Lord Jesus from all positive action as Head, "from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col. 2:19). In secret and in silence, blessed be His name, all goes on (for the counsels of God must come to pass); but, speaking of visibility, speaking to those and of those who assume a corporate condition, a discussion on Christian ministry can never be perfect which throws the sources of it into local organization, and omits the

engagement of Christ according to Ephesians 4, and the action of the Holy Ghost in such language as "All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11). See 1 Peter 4. Dr. L. simply ignores all this.

It is in vain to say with some, that these gifts, those we mean for the edification of the body of Christ (Eph. 4), were not lasting, and were therefore superseded by elders. They are to last "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man;" and this is not yet accomplished. It is true that apostles no longer remain. They were the foundation: "As a wise masterbuilder," says Paul, "I have laid the foundation" (1 Cor. 3); but prophets, not foretellers, but forth givers of truth, still remain, and will do so, with evangelists, pastors and teachers; until at the Lord's coming (may it be very near!) we pass into glory.<sup>56</sup>

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56. W. W., *The Bible Treasury*, 10:157-160.

***Part 3:***  
***Ministry of the Word***  
***by Gift***





## Chapter 3.1

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### *Stated, but not Exclusive, Ministry*

#### *Introduction*

During the 1800s brethren gathered together to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ held that **Christian ministry is the exercise of gift**. Each Christian has one or more gifts. (In the first century some of these gifts were sign-gifts (not among Christians now) and others were not. Among the gifts that were not sign-gifts, some were gifts of public utterance and others were not). The gifts of public utterance (for ministry of the Word of God) are given to relatively few of the Lord's people.<sup>1</sup> The use of gifts for public utterance were referred to as a 'stated, but not exclusive, ministry.' Acts 13 illustrates what this means, as we shall see below. The "ruin of the church," a truth also held by these brethren, did not mean that there is a ruin of ministry. These brethren did not hold that though there was such a ministry at the beginning of the church's history, that because the church was now in ruins, there is no longer a 'stated, but not exclusive, ministry,' in the 1800s (or, in the 1900s).

#### *What is Stated, but not Exclusive, Ministry?*

Regarding the bearing of Acts 13:1 on the subject of ministry, W. Kelly wrote:

"And there were in the church" (or assembly) "that was at Antioch [certain] prophets and teachers." What is commonly called a stated ministry was there. All should give full weight to facts which if denied or overlooked would only weaken the testimony which God has given.<sup>2</sup>

It is the continual effort of those who oppose the truth of the church, and who deny the present ruined condition of it, to insinuate against such as have learnt from God to act on His own word, that they set aside ministry, and more particularly what they call "stated ministry." They do nothing of the kind. They deny an "exclusive or one man ministry. . ."<sup>3</sup>

But it is important to affirm that none understand the action of the Spirit who

1. "Ministry in the word is . . . the exercise of a gift in subservience to the glory of the Lord Jesus. It is consequently the calling of a few for the good of the many -- of all" (*The Bible Treasury* 7:175).

2. [I suggest that this sentence is a warning that to deny or overlook this teaching will weaken . . .]

3. [Thus, when Silas, a gifted man in ministry of the Word, came to Antioch, he took his place among those there who were stated to be prophets and teachers].

expose themselves and the truth (which is still more serious) to the deserved stigma of denying the real abiding-place of ministry. This is in no wise the question. All Christians who have light from God on these matters acknowledge ministry to be a divine and permanent institution. It is therefore of very great importance to have scriptural views of its source, functions, and limits. The truth of scripture, if summed up as to its character, amounts to this -- that ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift. This I believe to be the true definition of it.<sup>4</sup>

J. N. Darby wrote:

And let it be here remembered, that stated ministry has never been denied, but always in exercise amongst us -- always owned in principle. In half or more of the services, one who has gift has exercised his gift on his responsibility to Christ. This is known to every one. And for my own part I recognize it fully, be it one or two, if they agree together to do it. The teachers have waited on their teaching. It is an utter untruth or sheer prejudice to deny or lose sight of this. It is only in the meetings for worship, when the saints assembled as such, that this has not been the case. The profit of a stated ministry, all that is true in a one man ministry, has been in the fullest exercise among those called brethren. In their worship they have not sought sermons, but the presence of God -- the accomplishment of that promise, that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He will be in the midst of them. I avow I do not go there to hear a sermon; nor do I like to hear one. I go to worship, to find the Lord, and worship Him. And I judge that if brethren are become incapable of enjoying this, it is a very bad sign. I do *not* go with my ears there to hear man, however gifted, but to worship God; and I beg to press this on brethren. I feel thankful if any one be led of God (I trust we may be forgiven for still thinking this possible, in spite of the efforts to rob us of it), to give a word of exhortation or comfort. I know that the flesh has abused this, forgetting the word "*swift* to hear, slow to speak" -- "my brethren, be not many teachers." But I add, *most decidedly* that, though I have seen liberty used for license (and "*where* the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"), I have found where God was owned incomparably more of His presence and blessing than where man's arrangements have taken the place of God. There might be evils to deplore and to correct; but there was God to enjoy, because God was owned. Elsewhere I have found decent things of man, a fair show in the flesh, but a sepulchre. The God I found my delight in was not there. For even God's grace or gift in teaching is a wholly different thing from God's presence in the way of worship. But I add that, where in worship this latter is slighted, I never found even the former. It is written, "*Cursed* is the man who putteth his trust in man." Correct the evils, brethren; but let us not disown God nor His goodness. If you cannot know His presence in worship, nor what the blessing of this is, humble yourselves. You have suffered great loss, you have spiritually declined. Forgive me! But if (which I cannot believe, for I at any rate have found it among you) you have forgotten this joy -- pardon me here also -- I, poor as I am, and I feel this unfeignedly, I have not forgotten it. I shall, with His grace, continue to trust Him.<sup>5</sup>

A few more quotations from some brethren of the last century may be helpful

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4. *Lectures Introductory to the Study of Acts, the Catholic Epistles, and the Revelation*, London: Broom, pp. 90, 91 (1869). See also *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:281, 282.

5. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:353-355.

in seeing the view that they took of this matter, according to Scripture.

Neither a humanly-appointed nor a self-appointed ministry will ever suit within the hallowed precincts of the Church of God. All must be divinely gifted, divinely taught, and divinely sent.<sup>6</sup>

I define Christian ministry, then, to be, according to the Word of God, the exercise of a spiritual gift. Ministry in the word is the exercise of a gift which has the word for its subject-matter . . . .

Ministry means far more than a Christian speaking truly on scripture; it is the exercise of a positive gift from Christ . . . .

There may be flesh in both ways -- the vanity of coming forward, and the pride that shrinks from being thought vain. Both are wrong.

But it may be asked, "May not believers be mistaken?" Certainly; but where simply gathered to the name of the Lord, and instructed in the word of God, it is rather a critical experiment for an individual to get up and minister. Vanity and pride may be found everywhere, and are always evil; but assuredly of all places it is hardest to speak where the word of God is really weighed and intelligently applied. He who has not something from God is pretty sure to be found out there; and, if there is Christian plain dealing in love, he is sure to be discouraged . . . .<sup>7</sup>

. . . nobody among us holds that all are teachers or preachers, or any save those whom the Lord gives and sends.<sup>8</sup>

It is not a question of ministry, nor even of what people call "stated ministry." Who doubts stated ministry? At the same time who can deny that God uses servants of His who are not stated? I believe that He maintains His own title in the church of God to raise a man up to say a word, and it may be an important word, who might not be called on to speak again, -- only used for a particular purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Such is a far cry from an every man ministry and the idea that all persons in an assembly may prophesy in the assembly, founded on a misuse of 1 Cor. 14. The following is cited from the excellent paper by W. Trotter, *Five Letters on Worship and Ministry in the Spirit*, pp. 8, 9.<sup>10</sup> W. Trotter is here actually quoting from, and endorsing, an earlier paper by G. V. Wigram.

E. I have heard that you assert that every brother is competent to teach in the assembly of the saints.

W. If I did so, I should deny the Holy Ghost. No one is competent to do this

6. C. H. Mackintosh.

7. W. Kelly in *Christian Ministry*. p. 9.

8. W. Kelly in *The Bible Treasury* 9:96.

9. W. Kelly, *Lectures Introductory to Acts, The Catholic Epistles and the Revelation*, p. 317.

10. In *The Bible Treasury*, Feb. 1858, edited by W. Kelly, the following commendation of W. Trotter's paper appeared:

It is with great pleasure that we recommend to our readers this plain, sound, and seasonable tract ....

who has not received gift from God for this very purpose.

E. Well, but you believe that every brother in the assembly of the saints has a right to speak, if he is able.

W. Indeed I do not. I deny the right to any one, save God the Holy Ghost. A man may in nature be very able to speak, and to speak well, but if he cannot 'please his neighbor for good to edification,' the Holy Ghost has not fitted him to speak, and he is dishonoring God his Father, grieving the Spirit, and undervaluing Christ's church, if he does speak; and is showing moreover, his own self-will.

E. Well, what is the peculiarity which you do hold?

W. You may think it peculiar to me, perhaps, to believe, that as the church belongs to Christ, He has, in order that its attention may not be wrongly directed and its time misspent in listening to that which is not profitable (pretty as it may be), given gifts to it, by which alone it is to be edified and ruled.

E. No. I admit to that, and only wish that there were a little more coveting of such gifts from God, and more caution to put a stop to the use of every other means, however accredited by human power or eloquence.

W. I hold also that the Holy Ghost gives gifts to whom He pleases, and also what gifts He pleases. And that the saints ought so to be united together, as that the gift of one brother should never make the exercise of the real gift of another irregular, and that there should be an open door for the little as well as the great gifts.

E. That is a matter of course.

W. Not so; for neither in the Church of England, nor in Dissent, do I find 1 Corinthians 14 acted upon. Moreover, I assert that no gift from God has to wait for a sanction from the church ere it is used. If it is of God, He will accredit it, and the saints recognize its value.

E. Do you admit a regular ministry?

W. If by a regular ministry you mean a stated ministry (that is, that in every assembly those who are gifted of God to speak to edification will be both limited in number and known to the rest), I do admit it; but if by a regular ministry you mean an exclusive ministry, I dissent. By an exclusive ministry I mean the recognizing certain persons as so exclusively holding the place of teachers, as that the use of a real gift by any one else would be irregular, as, for instance, in the Church of England, and in most dissenting chapels, a service would be felt to be irregular which had been made up by two or three persons really gifted by the Holy Ghost.

E. On what do you build this distinction?

W. From Acts 13:1, I see that at Antioch there were but five whom the Holy Ghost recognized as teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Doubtless, at all the meetings it was only these five, one or more of them, who were expected by the saints to speak. This was stated ministry. But it was not an exclusive ministry: for when Judas and Silas came (chap. 15:32), they were pleased to take their place among the others, and then the recognized teachers were more numerous.

E. And what connection would this have with the giving out of a Psalm, *etc.*, or

with praying, or reading a portion of scripture?

W. These would fall like the rest entirely under the Holy Ghost's direction. Alas for the man whose self-will chose to give out a hymn, or to pray, or read a scripture, without the guidance of the Spirit! In doing these things in the assembly of the saints, he is professing to be moved and guided by the Holy Ghost; and to profess this where it is not true is very presumptuous. If the saints know what communion is, they will know how very difficult it is to lead the congregation in prayer and singing. To address God in the name of the assembly, or to suggest to it a hymn as the vehicle for the expression of its real state to God, requires great discernment, or else a most immediate guidance from God.

There were some closing remarks by G. V. Wigram that W. Trotter did not transcribe:

E. But if there were five gifted persons present at the meeting, how could they, without prearrangement, avoid clashing in their ministration?

W. By waiting upon the Holy Ghost, each would get his own guidance whether to speak or to be silent, and how and what to speak. And if while one was speaking another had a matter given to him, the first would gladly sit down (1 Cor. 14:30).<sup>11</sup>

By the habit of *prearrangement*, religious persons, at the freest meetings which they know, are now prevented one lesson of *dependence upon GOD*, and one opportunity of learning from Him, which those who act otherwise know to be very precious. By liberty of ministry, you will observe I do *not* mean that all the brethren present have liberty to speak; but that the Holy Ghost has liberty to use any gift Himself may have bestowed.

W. Kelly exhorted:

... let him remember, *he is wholly mistaken in supposing that we consider all Christians to be ministers in the word*. It is a few in the Church who are thus gifted for the edification of the many.<sup>12</sup>

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11. [In addition, I suggest that the second would wait until the first had concluded. There was to be no cutting off, or several speaking at one time -- RAH.]

12. *The "Brethren,"* Jersey: Tract Depot, p. 26.



## ***Chapter 3.2***

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### ***Ministry in the Assembly***

#### ***Introduction***

There are several notions that need to be rejected with regard to the subject of ministry in the assembly. These are:

- a person may speak without a gift for it;
- all males in the assembly are necessarily prophets;
- "prophets" in 1 Cor. 14 are not the same as those who have the gift of prophecy in 1 Cor. 12;
- "prophets" in 1 Cor. 14 means a brother "given a word" on occasion; and so for that occasion he is constituted a prophet;
- there has occurred "ministerial ruin" and so we cannot insist on the same order as described in the Word.

Clerisy sets aside the order of 1 Cor. 14 in one way. At the opposite pole, the notions above set aside the order of 1 Cor. 14 by allowance of speaking in the flesh (*ministerial flesh*). We shall reply to these notions under the following heads:

1. Christian ministry is by gift;
2. all brothers are not prophets;
3. prophets in 1 Cor. 12 and 14 are the same;
4. there is no Scripture for the idea of 'prophets for the occasion';
5. there is no "ministerial ruin" that parallels the ruin of the church;
6. ministerial flesh should be restrained.

### ***Christian Ministry is by Gift***

#### **CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IS THE EXERCISE OF GIFT**

Christian ministry (service) is the exercise of gift. When a Christian uses the gift(s) given to him in service to the Lord, as led by the Spirit, he is engaging



in Christian ministry.

I do say that the acting of the Holy Ghost in and by man, in a member of the body (which is what the apostle calls gift), is what we are to look for by faith, and is the only thing of any real value or power.<sup>13</sup>

These gifts are, properly, that which is called ministry. The apostle does not here speak of miracles, of healings, or of tongues: these things, the signs of power in the face of the world, were not the direct channels of His love to the church. Every gift is a ministry: for, as there are diversities of gifts, yet but one Spirit, so there are divers ministries, but one Lord. By the possession of a gift I become the servant of Christ, from whom I hold the gift by the Spirit, and whom the Spirit reveals as *Lord*. Hence every gift in exercise is a ministry.<sup>14</sup>

## RECOGNIZING A GIFT

The question arises, how do we recognize a gift:

How may any gift be ascertained, etc.? There is not a more important principle than that every gift ascertains itself in its exercise, as says the apostle Paul, "the seal of my apostleship are ye in the Lord." In the exercise of any gift, nothing can remove us from individual responsibility to the Lord. The Lord gave the gift, and the Lord requires the service. Do not mind the whole church (they are but "chaff") when they interfere with our responsibility to the Lord. Exercise the gift in subjection to God's word, and those who will judge, let them judge. I could not give up my personal responsibility to Christ (miserably as I may fail in it) for all the church ten times told over. The mark of the wicked and unfaithful servant was, that he was waiting for some other warrant than grace to use the talent which had been committed to him. People may say, but many false prophets may go forth thus. Yes, surely they may; and what control can you have over an evil spirit? In John's epistle to the elect lady, we find him saying, even to a woman, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not," etc. She even was made a judge of the truth. The remedy he had to secure the little ones against the snares of the devil was the truth.

The first thing we want is faithfulness, and real humbleness of mind; each one will then find his proper niche.<sup>15</sup>

## *Prophecy in 1 Cor. 12 and 14 is the Same*

### 1 CORINTHIANS 14 IS GROUNDED ON 1 CORINTHIANS 12

Here is what W. Kelly said about that:

In coming to chapter 14, then, we have not the principle (that we have in ch. 12) nor the spring of power as in ch. 13, but the practice, the application, of the great truth. It is true -- and I make the remark because I have seen it objected to not

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13. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:334.

14. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 1:223.

15. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 31:303.

very long ago – that we hear little about gifts in chapter 14. The reason is because God supposes that we have read chapter 12. He does not write the word to save people trouble, nor is it written, as men preach, in texts; by which the scriptures are divorced, and their strength in connection destroyed . . .

In Chapter 14 the gifts, of which the apostle had been speaking in chapter 12, are supposed. To argue as unbelief does, as if there were nothing in ch. 14 of the same nature as in ch. 12 is mere folly.<sup>16</sup>

The prophets of 1 Cor. 14 refer to the gift of prophecy of 1 Cor. 12. W. Kelly wrote:

As to the fullest ordering of the assembly in scripture, it is found in 1 Corinthians 14, as grounded on 1 Corinthians 12.<sup>17</sup>

J. N. Darby said:

We have the doctrine in chapter 12, and the exercise of gifts in chapter 14.<sup>18</sup>

I believe, if we were to act on 1 Corinthians 12, 14, farther than power exists to verify it, we would make a mess.<sup>19</sup>

## PROPHETS HAD GIFT

And yet Mr. Wolff speaks here of the ministry of the prophet, which, we must therefore suppose, was exercised without gift. A singular ministry this! -- that of a prophet without gift; a ministry the vocation of which was from God alone. So that, in this case, we cannot speak of an outward vocation. It would be very difficult to conceive what could be the ministry which a prophet exercised without gift. The case is more striking than that of an apostle, because the office of the prophet was not so varied as that of the apostle. The only thing the prophet did was to prophesy. Of two things, one, according to Mr. Wolff's system: either they prophesied without gift; or else, exercising a gift, it was no longer a ministry.<sup>20</sup>

We have, then, to remark, on this chapter, that prophecy, which was wholly a gift in all its parts, is acknowledged to be a ministry, and that consequently ministry was the exercise of a gift, because the prophet did exercise his gift when he prophesied, and if that was not his ministry, it is very difficult to know what was his ministry as prophet.<sup>21</sup>

"Let the other judge," it is said (1 Cor. 14:29), when gifts were exercised.<sup>22</sup>

That is, *charisma* is the source of speaking (*charisma* being simply the expression for all that the manifold grace gives) and it is forbidden to speak in any other way: it is to be ascribed to the gift of God. And I apprehend that if

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16. *The Action of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly*, Morganville: Present Truth Publishers, p. 38, 39 (1984 reprint).

17. *The Bible Treasury* 10:350. See also *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:336, 337.

18. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 26:286; see also 3:336, 337.

19. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:95.

20. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:224.

21. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:225.

22. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:302.

saints, one and all, were honestly thus to wait upon God, there would be a great deal more real gift, and gifts of less human attainment would be better appreciated; while many a person would be kept in healthful silence, because he could not say that he spoke as of God: and if this were demanded, the flesh would be more easily detected, if he pretended to do so. At any rate, such is, I have no hesitation in affirming, the only true meaning of the apostle.<sup>23</sup>

## PROPHETS TODAY

It is a mistake to think that all prophets spoke by inspiration in the Corinthian assembly:

But if there be a revelation to another sitting [there] let the first be silent (1 Cor. 14:30).

The first one was speaking in the normal, non-revelatory prophetic ministry as compared to the next one, who had a revelation. The first continues today, while none now speak in revelations. Tongues, knowledge and prophecy of 1 Cor. 13:8-10 refers to the gifts in 1 Cor. 12:8, 10. Tongues have ceased (1 Cor. 13:8)<sup>24</sup> but the gifts of knowledge and prophesy continue until that which is perfect has come (1 Cor. 13:9, 10), which will occur when the Lord comes for us.

... but prophets, not foretellers, but forth givers of truth, still remain, and will do so, with evangelists, pastors and teachers; until at the Lord's coming (may it be very near!) we pass into glory.<sup>25</sup>

## ***Bramble Bush Ministry***

### THE BRAMBLE BUSH

It has been well observed, that, in Jotham's parable of the bramble king, we learn the important truth, that, wherever there is real power or gift in any one, he will be lifted up above the desire for mere official standing. The vine, the fig-tree and the olive, would not take the office of king because they were already endowed with inherent competency to bless; but the bramble that had *nothing* was glad to assume office to make himself *something*.<sup>26</sup>

Without gift the ministry of any man is a sham; while the exercise of gift by the humblest Christian is real ministry.<sup>27</sup>

### GOING BEYOND ONE'S GIFT

I do doubt that many a brother's gift would be recognized, if he did not go beyond his measure in it. If he prophesy, let him prophesy according to the

23. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:328.

24. The sign-gifts (of which tongues is one -- 1 Cor. 14:22) have ceased, as apostles, and prophets speaking in revelations, have also ceased; while the other gifts continue to exist.

25. W. W., *The Bible Treasury*, 10:157-160.

26. *The Present Testimony* 1:195n (1849).

27. *The Bible Treasury* 6:256.

proportion of faith -- all beyond that is flesh, and putting himself forward; and this is felt, and his whole gift rejected: and it is his own fault, because he has not known how to confine himself to it, and therefore his flesh was acting; and his speaking is attributed to this, and no wonder. It is also true as to the nature of a gift; if a man sets about to teach, instead of confining himself -- to exhorting, if he exhorts, he will and cannot edify.<sup>28</sup>

## ***All Brothers are not Prophets***

Another wrote:

Many men now, and sometimes women, having merely ability and readiness to convey their impressions, assume to and undertake to declare the gospel and the word of God. Now while heartily I should say, "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets!" yet I feel that we must not lose sight of the solemn and holy business and calling of a "minister of Christ." If a man is assured that the Lord has entrusted to him a commission to preach or to teach, then he is bound to fulfil this ministry. And if this be the case, he will not only be assured himself, but the spiritual (those whose judgment is of any weight), will be able to recognize the gift of the Lord in him . . . .<sup>29</sup>

It is obvious that only those that had the *gift* for it were to speak. J. N. Darby wrote:

The prophets were to speak two or three, and the others judge; if they had not the gifts, of course they were to be silent . . . .<sup>30</sup>

Only two of three prophets were to speak in the assembly; there might be twenty that had gifts in it, but the order of the assembly was for men: for women it was to hold their tongues. The possession of a gift by a man did not warrant their breaking the rule laid down by the apostle . . . .<sup>31</sup>

. . . there was preclusion of none because of their character as laymen. Women were the precluded class: there the line was drawn. If men had not the gift of speaking, of course they would be silent, if they followed the directions there given.<sup>32</sup>

Priesthood does not confer the right of preaching; it is the *gift* which imposes this duty on the one who has received it. If, for example, a spiritual capacity for preaching is met with, the Church can neither confer it nor take it away. Neither gifts, nor the right to preach, are the portion of all; and it is very wrong to consider the right of preaching as a right of man. It is a duty which flows from a gift, an obligation toward God. Woe to him who does it not, if God has

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28. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:339.

29. "Is Every One a Preacher?" *A Voice to the Faithful* 1:178 (1867).

30. "What the Christian has amid the Ruin of the Church," *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:289.

31. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:330.

32. The reference has escaped me.

conferred the gift on him.<sup>33</sup>

How many times did JND have to say these things before those who want license for every male (which is, really, license for the flesh) to be able to "give a word" (or, "share some thoughts") in the assembly, will stop taking another statement of JND's to make it mean their disorderly notion?<sup>34</sup>

R. Holden wrote:

... on any given Lord's-day there might be present in the midst a dozen other divinely-gifted persons, through any of whom it might be the Spirit's wish to edify the flock of God . . . .<sup>35</sup>

C. J. Davis pointed out the two extremes of error:

Saints forget this -- if they ever knew it -- who sanction *men*, when the *Holy Ghost* should be free 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* [of the Word]; for it is distinctly said "there were in the church (or assembly) certain prophets and

33. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:3, note.

34. Such a use is made of the letter, *Letters of J. N. Darby*, 3:339. Why would anyone force JND into contradicting himself, other than zeal for a false notion leading to disorder in the assembly? And if you think that this letter contradicts what was cited above, from JND, observe how easy it is to view all the statements as teaching the same thing. He closed the letter by writing:

To all others [the brothers], it is permitted, if the Spirit gives them anything.

The Spirit gives to those who have the gift for ministry of the Word in prophesy; i. e., the prophets.

Concerning his comment that the "prophets are not considered as a distinct body of persons at all," why construe this to mean that he held that all were necessarily prophets, thus forcing him into contradicting so much he wrote elsewhere? It is really a comment against clerisy -- that 'distinct body.' He wrote:

I said they wished to have a clergy: where ministry is limited, where authorities, officially recognized, are found, there is a clergy, because ministry becomes a separate class. According to the word, *the members of the body of Christ* act according to the energy which is communicated to them from above, each in its own place, subject to the discipline prescribed in the word, and the rules given there; and they exercise their ministry in the whole body, according as God has dealt to each. In a clerical sect, ministry is limited to those who are officially recognized in its bosom (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:232).

Recall, in this connection, that JND believed in a "stated ministry." That is not what he meant by a "distinct body." Nor does the fact that every brother in an assembly may not be a prophet constitute those who are prophets to be a "distinct body"; because, whenever God raises up additional gifted men, or when gifted men come from other assemblies, there is liberty for them to minister by gift also. There is never true liberty for the flesh, whether in one, or in many, or in all setting aside God's order. The prophets, as are teachers, etc., are not clergy in a church but, rather, gifts to the body.

35. *Ministry of the Word, Eldership, and the Lord's Supper*, Morganville: Present Truth Publishers, p. 16.

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.<sup>36</sup>

W. Kelly remarked:

But as to the discernment of ministerial gift for preaching and teaching, it is in general plain and simple. If a brother stand up to speak in the Christian assembly without a gift from God, he will soon and painfully find it out. If self-judging, he will learn much from his own conscience; but he may quite sufficiently soon hear from others that which will make him understand that he has not a gift in the judgment of his brethren.<sup>37</sup>

Apparently W. Kelly did not think that there would arise a doctrine of 'prophets for the occasion,' a doctrine of come-and-go gifts. And no wonder, for it seems so incredible. However, there are those without gift for it who do speak in their assemblies -- instead of hearing from their brethren that they have no gift for it. Moreover, those who resist this disorder of the flesh should be aware that where this ministerial flesh is condoned by a manufactured doctrine, the flesh will find a way (even with pious sound) to rise up against those who resist -- a not surprising thing. Such a doctrine and its support are, of course, evidence of a breakdown. It signals what the sunken state is and helps degrade that state more. The ministry needed for that state is shut off; i.e., the Lord's voice is drowned out, the true prophetic ministry is hindered, rejected and repulsed, and eventually the price for feeding the flesh is paid.

## *No Such Thing as Prophets for the Occasion*

[Are] all apostles? [are] all prophets? [are] all teachers? [are] all [in possession of] miraculous powers? . . . ( 1 Cor. 12:29).

In the following quotation from J. N. Darby, observe not only his *positive* statement concerning the **permanency** of gifts, but also his *denial* of there being a gift on occasion, as may be seen in his denial that one may receive "an act of pastorship."

He does not give pastorship, He gives pastors. This is not unimportant, because Paul a prophet was not always prophesying, though always a prophet, and he was an apostle, though not always exercising his apostleship. Therefore Christ does not give apostleship but apostles. . . .

Supposing I say I give you an act of pastorship today, and that is all about it. This is not the case here. He gives the man as a pastor, and he is always a pastor, though God might deprive him of it if He liked. The man has that place and function. Paul was always an apostle. It was not a certain thing that came upon

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36. *Aids to Believers*, p. 30, 1880 ed.; p. 110 in later editions.

37. *Lectures on the Church of God*, p. 203.

him and was gone, but he was an apostle always.<sup>38</sup>

The notion of "prophets for the occasion" means God gives 'an act of prophethip,' which notion is the denial of the permanence of the gift.

The notion of "prophets for the occasion" amounts to the idea that every Christian male throughout church history was potentially a prophet.

What the notion does is violate the truth of stated ministry.

The notion also makes of the prophets of 1 Cor. 14 something different than the prophets of 1 Cor. 12.

Gifts are permanent endowments, as J. N. Darby said:

I should also remark, that the Holy Ghost teaches us here that while He distributes to every man severally as he will, and uses whom he will, so that all openness is to be maintained for His operations, there are distinct permanent gifts whereby men are constituted teachers, prophets, or the like, though their teaching and prophesying may still be in constant dependence on the action of the Holy Ghost Himself. These directions, in fine, as to tongues and interpretations -- the number and manner of prophets speaking -- women speaking -- show the distinct control of the Holy Ghost Himself (thus is its order expressed in the word) over the exercise of all entrusted gifts *in the Church*, where the Holy Ghost habitually dwelt and guided for the edifying of all. Liberty and guidance is characteristic of Christianity, and is distinctive of *power making willing*, and the wisdom of God for us.<sup>39</sup>

The notion of a prophet for the occasion, an abuse of the order given 1 Cor. 14, is a violation of the whole subject of gifts. God does not give 'come and go gifts,' here this meeting, gone the next meeting, and come again the one after. Christian ministry is the exercise of gift. This, of course, does not preclude God withdrawing a gift from a person in connection with his governmental, disciplinary ways. It is also possible that God would extraordinarily use a man once, no doubt for much needed rebuke, just as God could use even Balaam's ass, if He so sees fit, but obviously this is not what is under discussion here. Such measures on God's part would indicate a very bad state of the saints, indeed -- as the self-willed conduct of Balaam indicated that in him.

In reality, the notion is (even if unintentionally) a denial of ministry by gift.

Accordingly, the false notion is fostering 'ministry' which is not by actual gift and therefore is not Christian ministry. What is it, therefore? Why has there been generated this setting aside of stated ministry? What is the reason this is being fostered? And, why would not this sanctioned disorder, of which God is not the author, foster a fleshly state; and the fleshly state more disorderly 'ministry'?

Now, what about those who spoke in tongues and those who interpreted? Consider that there was no such thing as a 'come and go' gift of tongues; i.e., a gift of tongues for the occasion only. It was a gift noted in 1 Cor. 12. Besides

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38. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 27:73.

39. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:132.

that, those who spoke in tongues were to be silent if no interpreter was present (1 Cor. 14:28). Interpreters were recognized persons; stated persons, if you will. The saints knew who they were. There was no 'come and go' gift of interpretation; i.e., a gift of interpretation for the occasion only -- which is expressly contradicted by 1 Cor. 14:27, 28.

Note that putting forward a doctrine about "prophets for the occasion" is really a repudiation of the recovered truth about 'stated, but not exclusive, ministry.'

We have seen that 1 Cor. 14:31 does not mean "ye can ALL [all males in all assemblies] prophesy." Rather, it is a corrective instruction to the prophets who were cutting off one another and/or speaking at the same time as another prophet. Ye [prophets of vv. 29,30] may all prophesy ONE BY ONE. (For more on this I refer the reader to my *The Word of God Versus the Charismatic Renewal*, which contains a lengthy verse by verse exposition of 1 Cor. 14, along with many quotations on the subject of ministry.)

Let us close this section with more from J. N. Darby:

I do not at all say that in any gathering where such is the state of things, those who can edify very little or not at all are to force themselves on the gathering, or to be encouraged in that state of things to speak. If it does not edify, it can be of no use. The point is, that all should feel what the state of things is, and above all not sanction as right what is proof of failure and decay. I have no hesitation in saying that worse spiritual decline is always the consequence.<sup>40</sup>

I always maintain, as the only true and possible meaning of the passage -- 1 Peter 4:10, that *to speak as the oracles of God* does not mean to speak according to the scriptures, though this be also necessarily the case, but *to speak as announcing the oracles of God*, as Martin translated it. For my part, if this be not done, I know not why I should listen.<sup>41</sup>

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40. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:321, 322.

41. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:61.





## ***Chapter 3.3***

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### ***There is no "Ministerial Ruin" that Parallels the Ruin of the Church***

Brethren held the truth that the church was in ruins, and wrote the things quoted above while recognizing the ruin, but said that ministry is a divine and permanent institution. There are places where practice has changed and a doctrine has been generated to sanction it. The flesh has ever increasingly been allowed in practice; and it surely follows that it would be increasingly allowed in "ministry" until that which is not Christian ministry is tolerated. Indeed, not only is it tolerated, but, as in the case where the **doctrine** of the Nicolaitanes (Rev. 2:15) followed the **practice** of the works (Rev. 2:6), so it must needs be that where ministerial flesh is tolerated, it will become protected by changing the teachings once believed and practiced. In connection with such a state, even the teaching regarding the ruin of the church will be tampered with in order to tolerate ministerial flesh. For example, it may be said that there is also a ruin of ministry.

I do not accept such a notion as 'the ruin of ministry' or 'ministerial ruin.' Such notions are gotten up for some unscriptural, and unfaithful, objective. In reality, even if with no such conscious intent, it makes provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. The fleshly state, visited with fleshly ministry, makes excuses for such ministry, and this reciprocally fosters an even worse, fleshly state.

#### **THE ABEYANCE OF SIGN-GIFTS AND OF OFFICIAL ELDERS DOES NOT ENTAIL RUIN OF MINISTRY FOR EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH**

It is true that we have not sign-gifts or elders appointed by an apostle or his delegate (cp. Titus 1:5) since the passing of the apostles and the ruin of the church. However, that situation does not entail "ministerial ruin" of the gifts for edification of the church.

Before going farther, let it be remarked, that the gifts are of two kinds: first, such as serve to awaken souls, and to gather the Church; and, secondly, such as are signs to the world, signs of the presence of God in the Person of the Spirit in the Church. The Epistle to the Ephesians speaks to us only of the former; the Epistle to the Corinthians speaks of both. The word of God itself makes the above distinction, when it says that tongues are for a sign to unbelievers, and prophesyings are for believers (1 Cor. 14:22). This distinction is important, because it is impossible that anything should fail which is necessary for the conversion of souls, and for the building up of saints; whereas it is easy enough to conceive that God should withdraw that which was an ornament to the Church, and a token of its acceptability, when the Church is unfaithful, and when, instead of honoring God, she has grieved the Spirit. Nevertheless this

external testimony remained, according to the wisdom of God in the Church, so long as it was needed, in order to confirm the preaching of the truths of the gospel.<sup>42</sup>

Now God may withdraw as He pleases gifts which He distributes as He pleases (that is, some of those which are only a testimony rendered to the Church before the world); but Christ nourishes the Church according to His faithfulness, and this rests on another basis. This also may be weakened if the Holy Ghost is grieved. Nevertheless, the Holy Ghost Himself remains in the Church for ever.

And this calls forth an important remark as to this question, whether the evil is without remedy. All the strength and energy of the Church being derived from the presence of the Holy Ghost, the comparison of what the manifestation of the Holy Ghost was at the beginning, and the forgetting of His presence now, will lead us to feel all that is humbling in our state, and to understand the sentence of God unto cutting off, and not unto restoration. But the thought that the Holy Ghost abides for ever with the Church gives us an unlimited source of hope -- that God will do all that is necessary for the blessing of the Church in the state where it is. And as it is the presence of God Himself, one can put no limit to what He could do. But what He will do will be according to our need and our state, and not as though He Himself ignored the state which the presence of His Spirit leads to feel, as though nothing had happened. Hence I fully believe in the cutting off of the dispensation, because of the failure of the Church; but I put no limit to what God, meanwhile, may do in grace towards believers. Only, it will be according to the truth, as to their state, and according to the faith which recognizes that.<sup>43</sup>

## THE RUIN OF THE CHURCH DOES NOT ENTAIL MINISTRY-RUIN

Regarding the bearing of the ruin of the church upon ministry, W. Kelly wrote:

I thoroughly hold ministry to be a divine institution, and I do not believe that the ruined state of the church touches ministry in the smallest degree. There are persons over us in the Lord, but the moment you touch the source of ministry, that moment you separate ministry from the principles of the word of God. Now I believe that both the church and ministry are divine institutions, but in order to preserve their divine characters they must be regulated by the word of God and not by men's new inventions and shifting ideas.<sup>44</sup>

The more we have the sense of the ruin of the Church, the fuller our confidence that God's principles always remain intact and as obligatory as on the day of Pentecost . . .

But exclusive ministry, I am bold to say, is an interference with the rights of Christ and with the action of the Holy Ghost. God has caused to be felt in these last days the ruin of the church more than at any epoch known to me in its past history; but He has also made souls learn and feel that no ruin of the Church destroys a divine principle. What *was* the truth for the Church *is* the truth for him who believes. The original principle of ministry ever abides the only

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42. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 14:2, 3.

43. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:298, 299; see also 3:135, 136, 303; 1:230; 4:10).

44. *Jeremiah* . . ., London: Hammond, pp. 30, 31 (1938 reprint).

principle which He sanctions or we ought to follow.<sup>45</sup>

We cannot do what apostles did unless we are clothed with like authority; but we have Christ ever abiding the immediate giver of ministerial gifts: this is always true. Ministry does not and never did depend upon apostles or the Church, but upon Christ; and therefore it cannot lapse.<sup>46</sup>

Such notions as coupling some kind of alleged 'ruin of ministry' or 'ministerial ruin' with the truth of the ruin of the church, appear to me to be an effort to excuse and/or palliate the toleration of ministerial flesh instead of faithfully disciplining it.

Consequently, to affirm that the teaching of the apostles on the subject of ministry and its action does not apply to later ages, is to say that there is no longer either a body of Christ, or faithfulness in its Head to nourish it. That is impossible. Moreover the Comforter will abide with us for ever.

Many things, indeed, are lost. Tongues are no longer spoken, miracles are no longer performed. That which was connected with the external testimony and established the authority of the word is no longer found in the present day; but that which is of the substance of things, that is to say ministry which calls and which nourishes, exists at all times. 1 Corinthians 4 and 14; Romans 12; and 1 Peter 4:10, 11, contain instructions the force of which will subsist as long as the Church shall be on earth. One ought to take account of other passages which reveal to the heart and conscience our actual position before God, and which in various respects, modify the application of those I have named;<sup>47</sup> but until we come to the measure of the stature of Christ, He will nourish the Church for its increase, and the Church will make increase of itself by this means.<sup>48</sup>

## THE BODY AND THE GIFTS

In the controversy that arose respecting the abiding of *gift*, properly so called, in the Church now, I do not know that I saw the Scripture truth put in the same *naked*, singularly simple light, in which it appears to me to stand in the Word. Scripturally speaking, we may say that the existence of gift in the Church rests on the basis of another truth, which can never be *altered*; viz., "that there is one body, and many members." If you can shake the one, you may shake the other; but with it it will stand.

And let me ask, What is the object, the subject of gift, the best gift? Is it not the

45. *Lectures on . . . Ephesians*, London: Morrish, pp. 206, 207, n. d.

46. *Ephesians*, on ch. 4, *in loco*.

47. Thus, as regards gift in the church, for instance, those which were called signs ("sign-gifts" as they are sometimes called, and a testimony to the world, signs being for those which believe not, as "tongues," "gifts of Healing," etc.), those may be gone; but never can those gifts be removed which flow down from the Head to sustain the members of the body; for "no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it even as the Lord the church" (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 5:343, 344).

See also *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:167 and his *Notes and Jottings*, p. 289.

48. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 4:72, 73.

knowledge of God, and of Christ? And is there less fullness now in God or in Christ, for the Church? Is there less of spiritual blessing . . . in heavenly places in Christ? less treasures of wisdom and knowledge? Has, or can apostasy change our relations to Christ (John 15:15); or the boundless store which the Spirit has to unfold? (John 16:14,15). Therefore, I suppose, I might fairly ask, why gift, the best gift (1 Cor. 14:2, 3, 5), should not be the same now, though *modified* by circumstances?<sup>49</sup> If God is the same, and the Agent of instruction, the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10) the same, why should gift be changed? O no! it is ever God's word to His own: "I am the Lord thy God, which *brought thee out of Egypt*; open thy mouth wide and I will fill it."

With regard to the external gifts, miracles, etc., we might perhaps make this observation, that whilst God's principle abides the same, it remains with Him to apply that principle. He cannot, perhaps, own us in apostasy in testimony by power before the world; but He must always own Himself in love to the Church in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:12,13). For himself, the writer can record, that, in his own experience, every attempt at outward power has, to his apprehension, been decidedly counter-met by God; and this, I judge, according to His own principle in wisdom: for why should we exalt ourselves out of the ruin which we have made, and thus, perhaps, forget the very God from whom we have received it, instead of sinking low before Him in the consciousness of the entire *ruin* we have made; and there, *in that position*, received from Him every blessing that a loving hand can give? (John 13:8, 5).<sup>50</sup>

Persons abusing ministry is not 'ministerial ruin'; it is ministerial flesh. The ruin of the church is a corporate matter and there can be no restoration to the unruined condition. Ministry of the Word to edification did not undergo a ruin. There simply is no such a thing as a ruin of ministry that parallels the ruin of the church. Ministry is a question of gift, which is an individual matter.

## HOW THE GIFTS REMAIN WITH US

And now, one word upon the question as to how the gifts remain with us. The answer is -- they are treasured up in Christ. He, as another has well observed, is the great reservoir of spiritual gift for His body the Church; from Him she must draw them; and it is in proportion as the Church walks in communion with and in faithfulness to Him, that she will abound in gift, which, by the way, proves that we are not by any means to judge of the question of the continuance of gift by the fact of its not being developed, for the question may still be asked, "Why is it not developed?" Because the Church is not faithful. But shall the unfaithfulness of the Church hinder the Lord Jesus from being the grand depository of gift, but Christ, her Head, was, for to Him it was said, "*Thou hast received gifts*" (ἐλάβες δοματα). He, therefore, is the receiver and the holder of gifts, and it may be safely asserted that whatever *the Head* holds is available for *the body*.

Hence, we see the absolute necessity of avoiding every barrier to the outflow of ministerial gift or grace, for the Lord Jesus will shed it forth according to his

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49. [Prophets do not now speak by inspiration.]

50. G., "Gift Inalienable from the Church," *The Present Testimony* 2:51,53,54 (1850).

own sovereign will.<sup>51</sup>

Now what I would remark here is, the way in which the gifts (*charismata*) are indissolubly knit up with the unity and membership of the body. And this is no casual idea: we have found the same connected with the headship of Christ as *domata* in the Ephesians. Here we see the basis is stated, "by one Spirit we have been baptized into one body," and this baptism with the Holy Ghost is what distinguishes the Church, and the ministry of Christ Himself as exalted on high in respect of it -- "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." Having stated the principle in chapter 12, and the excellency of charity in chapter 13, in chapter 14 he applies it to the state of the Corinthian church, and we have connected with this subject singing, blessing, and giving thanks; and he prefers doing it with his mind. That is, the whole action of the Holy Ghost in the body is brought out in connection with this subject, whatever preminent gifts might be found among them.<sup>52</sup>

### OUR CONDUCT IN NOT JUDGING THE FLESH IS THE CAUSE, NOT "MINISTERIAL RUIN."

We should pause to observe, however, that the state of an assembly may affect what it receives in ministry.<sup>53</sup> J. N. Darby wrote:

There [in the epistle to the Corinthians] the Spirit is looked at as present, and operating in the body generally, in the power of *God*, "as God has set in the church" -- witness of, and subservient to, the Lordship of Christ, and therefore including that in which it was the witness of this to the world; and therefore the gift in its exercise is dependent in many respects on the competency of the Church by its state to stand as a witness, or the wisdom of God in so using it.<sup>54</sup>

The gifts spoken of here are to continue, because the body can never cease to be the object of the love of Christ, let it fail ever so much in witness to the world. The question may be asked, had not the church at Corinth failed, and yet the gifts remained amongst them? No; not in the sense in which the church has now failed.<sup>55</sup>

The state to which he refers was the fleshly state at Corinth, **before the ruin of the church**. Why, of course the state of an assembly can have an affect upon the ministry it receives; and the carnal Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:1) had plenty of fleshly activity in ministry, in the assembly (1 Cor 14). But it was not a 'ministerial ruin' due to the ruin of the church, which ruin of the church had not yet occurred when Paul wrote to the Corinthians. A Corinthian state can be present at any time in history, even during the time of the ruin of the church, and the effect of that state on ministry can be felt. And, of course, the ruin of the church itself sets aside the free action of the gifts, but that is not 'the ruin of

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51. *The Present Testimony* 1:174, 175 (1849).

52. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:336, 337.

53. Smallness of a particular gift, or lack of gift, is not ruin of gifts concomitant with, or paralleling, the ruin of the church, which is a false idea gotten up so as not to deal with our state.

54. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 3:135.

55. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 31:302.

ministry.' W. Kelly who vigorously opposed the notion, pointed out that the state affects the development of gift:

In the present state of the church there is but a feeble development of gift, and this is felt the more in proportion to spiritual intelligence and a true position.<sup>56</sup>

The doctrine I have called "prophets for the occasion" makes its contribution to the enfeeblement of the development of gift. And what is the answer? Is the answer toleration of this carnality-supporting teaching because the church is in ruins? Has God taught us about the ruin of the church for the purpose of supplying us with a basis on which to tolerate the flesh? -- to refuse the Scripture teaching of stated, but not exclusive, ministry? -- to teach that the prophets of 1 Cor. 14 are come-and-go prophets? -- that the tongue speakers and interpreters were come-and-go gifts? Well, such notions foster ministerial flesh and spiritual decline. The tendency of counterfeit currency is to drive good currency out of circulation; and the tendency of fleshly ministry is to impede and drive away ministry by gift.

Read the following very carefully:

Many have left efficient ministry in system, in obedience to the Word as to the gathering of the saints, and the sovereignty of the Spirit; it is hardly to be expected they should be satisfied with worse, however under the deprivation of any. There is then ministry, and that of the Word, and all are not gifted for it. If it is confined to few, when we may safely be trusted with more we shall have it. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest."<sup>57</sup>

The reader needs to be alert to the fact that what underlies the false views on ministry that we are reviewing is a willingness to adjust the truth to make provision for going on with, for tolerating, ministerial flesh -- which answers to a fleshly state -- which generates more fleshly ministry.

The reader should be alert to the fact that the false views amount to a repudiation of the teachings given during the 1800s concerning stated, but not exclusive, ministry. They alter the truth about ministry. But those who do this do not want to acknowledge that fact. They prefer to put a false construction on what has been taught about these things. "Ruin" was used by some during the 1800s also to circumvent order, but faithful men then resisted that abuse. J. N. Darby was among those that resisted the false use of ruin:

Ruin has nothing to do with duty, except as it may incapacitate me, as a matter of fact, from carrying it out. No failure alters the character of responsibility, though the Lord may in mercy say, He will be satisfied, if we but act up to what we have got. But no direction of Scripture becomes invalid by reason of the state of ruin. The directions touching "tongues" are applicable as much as ever, only *we* cannot apply them because there are no gifts of tongues now.<sup>58</sup>

Some supporters of Bethesda denied the ruin while others used the teaching to foster allowance of unholiness and the flesh. W. H. Dorman testified:

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<sup>56</sup>. *Lectures on the Church of God*. p. 203.

<sup>57</sup>. *The Present Testimony* 4:157 (1853).

<sup>58</sup>. J. N. Darby, *Notes and Comments*, p. 360.

There was a time when brethren acknowledged the power of the Lord in bringing them together; and, in their association, rejoiced in His holy presence with them. Their whole souls would have shrunk from the thought of connecting with that presence anything that was evil in doctrine, or immoral in practice. They would have feared thus to grieve God's Holy Spirit; -- their present Guide and Comforter. It was never dreamt that "the ruin of the church" was to bind the allowance of evil upon their consciences; or that it took from them the power to disallow whatever was contrary to holiness and the honor of Christ.<sup>59</sup>

A. C. Ord wrote:

It is a wretched plea, that the ruin of the Church is a reason for submission to evil, and subversive of all moral principle and sense of what is due to Christ.<sup>60</sup>

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59. *A Review of Certain evils & Questions* . . . , p. 16 (1849).

60. *Is There Not a Cause?*, p. 18, n. d.





## Chapter 3.4

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### *Restraining Ministerial Flesh*

It is clear that these writers rejected an every man ministry as strongly as they opposed the "exclusive ministry" of the clergy system. They held no such idea that 1 Cor. 14 indicates an every man ministry or that it contemplates "prophets for the occasion." Following the order regarding `stated, but not exclusive, ministry' would relieve saints of ministry that God does not send -- even in cases where nothing unscriptural might be said. Ministerial flesh should be restrained.

And here I begin by admitting that what is called open ministry [1 Cor. 14] has given occasion to the flesh. But I do not think the remedy for it is to deny the presence and operation of the Spirit of God . . . And I will add further that, while I admit that the flesh has taken occasion from spiritual liberty to take license to itself (as God has warned us it would), and while I think that flesh acting thus ought, as in every other case, to be judged by the Church if the individual does not judge it for himself . . . <sup>61</sup>

Men of spiritual intelligence in scripture . . . assume no authority to interdict, unless error or other evil should draw out open rebuke or even more. <sup>62</sup>

With regards to speaking, I am quite clear those who speak error ought to be stopped, and those, who speak merely from the suggestion of the flesh, ought to be first warned of it. Anyone may do it in love, but those who guide may, if it be needed, take it up, and that *for their own sakes* who have done it; and if there were habitual unprofitable speaking, I think it ought to be stopped . . . I desire the fullest liberty for the Spirit, but not the least for the flesh. . .

On the other hand, I am very jealous of meddling, merely because there is not the same refinement, or people being puffed up for one against another; that is just the flesh in another shape. The poor often get profit, where a refined ear would be offended. It is a holy loving wisdom which must order this. In [cases] of error, the act should be prompt, in cases of profit, patient. But I must say I have not the least idea of subjecting myself to the self-will of another's notion, that he is to speak when he cannot profit the church. I should take the liberty of going away in such an extreme case, and try the question summarily if driven to it. I never knew the Lord to desert me, or rather the act of obedience to His own will. In such a case, I have no right to wrong the whole church of God, making them unhappy, and *hindering the gathering of the saints*, to humor the flesh of any. <sup>63</sup>

As to the second point, that of teaching meetings, if I remember, the same

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61. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:319.

62. *The Bible Treasury* 14:299.

63. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:30.

difficulty had occurred before, but it appears to me the matter is very simple. I scarcely understand the difficulty, as it seems to me to deny the exercise of a gift, which I am bound to exercise according to my responsibility to Christ. As to the circumstances of its exercise, they are comparatively immaterial. That one teach, or that more than one take part if united in work, is a matter for them to judge of, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Paul and Barnabas assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. He who has the gift of teaching is responsible to Christ for the exercise of his gift; it may be exercised in private; in the meeting together of brethren, if so led, on the Lord's day; or he may assemble them to teach them if he has the capacity for it, for he is acting then on the responsibility which lies on him to trade with his talent. That this should be done with the concurrence and in the unity of the brethren, is natural where charity exists, and desirable: but if one has a gift of teaching, one is accountable for its exercise in charity where it can be blessing to the church. Only, if in the assembly he act in the flesh, that, not his gift, is a subject of discipline -- as when tongues were used for vain glory. It is a question of edifying. Charity uses a gift for edifying, but charity is bound to use the gift for edifying. Besides, if there are brethren who in conscience do not approve of it, their path is easy, not to sanction it by their presence; but they ought not to make their conscience or scruple the law of others' conduct, where it is matter of spiritual judgment.<sup>64</sup>

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The reader who is interested in pursuing further the subject of ministry (and why not?) would find more in the following publications of Present Truth Publishers:

*A Few thoughts on Ministry in the Assembly, or, The Lord's Messenger and the Lord's Message.*

*The Word of God Versus the "Charismatic Renewal"* which contains a verse by verse exposition of 1 Cor. 14.

*Some Considerations Concerning the Subject of Ministry in the Assembly and "Reading Meetings."*

W. Kelly, *The Action of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly.*

R. Holden, *Ministry of the Word, Eldership, and the Lord's Supper.*

See also W. Kelly, "The Assembly and Ministry," Ch. 3 in *Lectures on the Church of God*, and also ch. 5, "Gifts and Local Charges."

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64. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:57.

# Appendix 1

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## Deacons

### 1 Tim. 3:8-13

#### VERSES 8, 9.

**Ministers.** 1 Tim. 3:8-13 begins with "Ministers, in like manner . . .," and on this we must dwell a little. The word is "*Diakonos*, 'servants' or 'deacons.'" <sup>1</sup> The word "servant" is good; it is descriptive; it is used numerous times in Scripture. <sup>2</sup> It signifies one "who acts or waits in service." It is a subject of

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1. Footnote in J. N. Darby's translation.

2. The Greek word is simple enough: it is one who serves, any servant who was not properly a slave; *diakonia* is any service whatever. It was very natural to use this word in speaking of evangelical service; but the word is used in the New Testament as elsewhere, to signify service; this service might be the ministry or service of the word, or of tables, or of angels, or any other service of whatever kind. The word is used in an absolute way with respect to service of angels in Hebrews 1:14. In 2 Timothy 4:11, it is said of Mark, "He is profitable to me for the ministry"; here it does not appear that it is merely a question of the ministry of the word; we see the use of this word *diakonos* with respect to Mark; when Paul and Barnabas departed from Antioch, they had Mark to "their minister [here, *hupereteen*]" ; it was not, I suppose, to preach to them. At some later period perhaps he may have purchased to himself "a good degree," in the ministry, a more honorable service in the family. When Paul says (2 Cor. 11:8), "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them to do you service"; it is evident that it is in a figurative sense, however absolute, and it does not refer to the ministry of the word as such. He had been servant of the Corinthians, and others had paid his wages. In Romans 12:7, we find the word used absolutely, together with, and as distinguished from, divers ministries of the word; and in 1 Cor. 12:5, it is used for all services, of any kind, done to Christ. The only time when it is used with the expression "the word," it has its usual sense modified by the expression "word," as it might be by any other. That is, "that service was occupied with this," in contrast with serving tables. But the service of tables was just as much a special service as that of the word; only of a lower character evidently in the administration of the family. And the fact is, that the only time this expression "ministry of the word" is found, the word ministry is used in an absolute way to signify the service of tables (Acts 6:1); and it is thus explained, in verse 2; then verse 4, the ministry of the word is contrasted with it; but it is added, "of the word"; and thus this word is not used in an absolute way with respect to the word, but on the contrary with respect to tables.

It appears to me, that it is limiting the thing, as the word does not limit it, when they pretend to confine the work of the ministry to the ministry of the word: for instance, Ephesians 4:12. Moreover, it is affirming what ought to be proved. At all events, in most of the passages, it is not so, as we have just seen. Angels have not the ministry of the word; and ministry is contrasted with that of the word in Acts 6:1-5. The fact is, that what Mr. Wolff says is absolutely false and contrary to the ordinary known use of this word in the word and outside the word. If we consider attentively the use of the word *diakonos*, minister, he who does the service, this will come out with still greater evidence. For the word *diakonos* used absolutely one may consult John 2:5, 9; Matthew 22:13; 20:26; 23:11, and the parallel passages; also John 12:26. This idea of servant must naturally be modified (as the word 'service' (*diakonia*); see 2 Cor. 3), according to the person whose servant one is, or the service one has to fulfil; one

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enquiry whether it refers to something official, or something characteristic, or a gift, in the contexts in which it is found. It will be helpful to at once point out that there is a "gift" of service, the obvious implication of which is that just because the word servant or service appears, it does not necessarily refer to something official:

But having different gifts . . . service, [let us occupy ourselves] in service (Rom. 12:6, 7).

It is possible that Phoebe had this gift:

But I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is minister of the assembly which is in Cenchrea; that ye may receive her in [the] Lord worthily of saints, and that ye may assist her in whatever matter she has need of you; for *she* also has been a helper of many, and of myself (Rom. 16:1, 2).

In a footnote to the word "minister" in this Scripture JND says:

*Diakonos*; deacon, or deaconess; the word 'minister' here connects with 'to minister' and 'ministry' elsewhere, as ch. 15:31. She did the needed service in the assembly there; she was not properly a servant.

I take the last sentence to mean that he did not think she had an office.

**In like manner.** The servants, in like manner to the overseers, must be characterized by a godly walk even though this service was of a lower order than oversight.

**Grave.** The servant is a serious person whose bearing shows that he considers his work as done unto the Lord. This characteristic commends him to those with whom he has to do.

**Not double-tongued.** No doubt we have heard of politicians who always seem to be on both sides of a matter. There are Christians like that. Not only is that despicable, it certainly disqualifies from this service. To speak with a "forked-tongue" is really *dishonesty* -- deceit. Think of such a person serving tables (see Acts 6).

**Not given to much wine.** Of course this does not refer to grape juice; nor does it prohibit wine-drinking. But it does address the issue of self-control. Think of a "deacon" dealing with a saint who is in personal difficulty and discovering lack of self-control in his habits of life. In giving help and counsel, he himself needs to be characterized by self-control.

**Not seeking gain by base means.** Think of a man dealing with money matters in regard to the Lord's things, and he himself stoops to base means in

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may be minister of God (2 Cor. 6:4), of the gospel (Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23), of the Church (Col. 1:25), etc. The word, taken in its general use, has its general acceptance of servant (Rom. 16; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12). Finally, the word, *diakonia* has the general sense of service, and has to be modified in its application by words which are added -- of the word (Acts 6), of death, of righteousness, of the Spirit, etc. (2 Cor. 3). There is not one passage which shows that the absolute sense signifies the ministry of the word, but quite the contrary (*Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* 3:221-223).

seeking gain for himself. We might think also of lack of self-control in money matters and a tendency to spend what he does not have.

**Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.** Aptness to teach is not a requirement as it is with elders. He must have some knowledge of the truths of Christianity and this truth must be held in a pure conscience. Thus there is more than a theoretical acquaintance with truth. The truth must be controlling and directing the walk, else there is not a pure conscience however loudly it may be affirmed that it is so. We cannot see conscience, but we can see its working in someone's walk.

Conscience is informed by truth, by teachings (doctrines). Doctrine is despised at one's peril (cp. 2 Tim. 3:16). It is a critically bad sign when sound teaching is down-played or despised. My own observation has been that this is often coupled with an emphasis on dealing with people's problems --allegedly more practical. However, many problems would not arise had sound teaching been given, been received, and a response in the walk been inculcated. Doctrine is meant to form behavior. When doctrine is down-played, those doing so will not have the character of their service formed and guided by the mystery of the faith, but will make provision for the flesh.

## VERSE 10

And let these first be proved, then let them minister, being without charge [against them].

W. Kelly wrote:

Proving them first might bring out their unfitness for the work; for there are many saints even, who cannot bear a little brief authority, and that which outwardly raises such soon exposes to moral degradation. To walk blamelessly in the least of such new duties was no small testimony of their fitness to serve in all.<sup>3</sup>

From the qualifications given in this passage, we can see that the proving of the servants is that these characteristics are in evidence and so they are suitable to this work. The principle is that faithfulness is demonstrated first in smaller things before being entrusted with larger responsibilities -- for the same characteristics are a prerequisite for both small and large responsibilities.

## VERSE 11

[The] women in like manner grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

The apostle had spoken of Christian women in general in 1 Tim. 2:9-15. Here, he has not interrupted the subject of servants to return to women in general. Moreover, he is not speaking of a special class of women -- as if these were a class of 'deaconesses,' or a class of 'deacon's assistants.' He here speaks of the

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3. *An Exposition of the Two Epistles of Timothy*, London: Hammond, p. 64, n. d.

women of the servants, i.e., their wives.<sup>4</sup> They must have a character suitable to the work that their husbands carry out. The implication is that they may assist in certain things regarding temporal matters. The women of the elders are not mentioned; they do not assist their husbands in oversight. Oh yes, there may be women that might like to rule *through* their husbands, but it is ungodly to do so, even if not so brazenly defiant of divine order as those women who today seek to be office-bearers and/or teachers in the church, assisted in this by men devoid of obedience to the plain statements of Scripture that they pervert to their own agenda. At any rate, the qualities here enumerated would happily be found in all Christian women -- and are necessarily required in the wife of a servant.

"Not slanderers" is important. Is not gossip in many cases, if not most, a form of slander?

## VERSE 12

Let [the] ministers be husband of one wife, conducting [their] children and their own houses well:

See the comments on this above for the elders. Even one serving in temporal matters could not be a polygamist or have a disorderly household. How deal with temporal matters in the households of others when one does not keep his own vineyard (S of S 1:6)?

## VERSE 13

for those who shall have ministered well obtain for themselves a good degree, and much boldness in faith [is] in Christ Jesus.

This means that, like Stephen and Philip, they may obtain a greater line of service besides, or instead of, 'serving tables,' blessed as that privilege is. Acts 7 records the "much boldness" of Stephen. Grace was actively working in these men. W. Kelly remarked:

If grace for such a work is overlooked, the deaconate degenerates into a mere demand for business tact to the dishonor of God in the church, helping on the descent to the world's level.<sup>5</sup>

## ***Acts 6:1-7***

There are many who think that Acts 6:1-7 describes the origin of "the office of a deacon." It may be well to immediately point out that:

1. the disciples chose the seven;

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4. Of course, the requirements noted here would also apply to the conduct of husbands whenever assistance was rendered by any woman, just as the other qualifications of deacons will apply to her in her service.

5. *The Bible Treasury*, New Series 5:104.

2. the apostles established, or appointed, the seven;
3. it was "over this business";
4. the seven are not called deacons;
5. and, in Acts 11:27-30, a choosing and appointing of such persons did not occur.

While the seven are not called deacons (διάκονος), the related word (διακονία) appears in the passage. The passage uses this later word in v. 1 concerning the "daily *ministration*" and in v. 4 of "the *ministry* of the word." This does not show, as clerics might presume, that ministry (service) of the Word of God is "deacon service" also. The word "deacon" has been pressed into an ecclesiastical usage that we might have been spared if the word for it was always rendered "servant." The expressions "deacon service" and "servant service" do not seem to carry the identical ecclesiastical flavor.

The fact is that the seven were appointed, by the apostles, "over *this* business." And while we may say that the carrying out of "*this* business" was diaconal in character,<sup>6</sup> it was limited in scope and hardly made them "deacons." When "*this* business" passed away, this service passed away, and so did the appointment to it pass away.

## ***Appendix 2***

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### ***On the Role of Elders in Making Assembly Decisions:***

#### ***Comments on a Letter by B. W. Newton And the Good Example of Sir Alexander Campbell***

A letter addressed to J. G. Deck by B. W. Newton in late 1845 or shortly thereafter is to be found in the Christian Brethren's Archive. In this letter, B. W. Newton (BWN) presents what he calls a "relation of facts" in connection with a controversy that then existed between him and J. N. Darby (JND). Along with the "facts" presented in the letter, BWN discusses the role of elders in making assembly decisions. His remarks on this topic shed light on the controversy and on assembly truth.

In all that follows, remember that the controversy between BWN and JND was multifaceted. Nevertheless, in late 1845 and for some time later, the most

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6. Let the reader observe how even the expression "diaconal in character" sounds a bit official. It had the character of Christian service, but such a phrase as "service-ical in character" is not English.



serious doctrinal aspects of the controversy were still hidden and played no part. Also, differences in views on prophecy had been out in the open for some years and are not central to the point we will be looking at here. At least neither BWN nor JND made their differences as to prophecy the ground of their differences on the role of elders in assembly decisions.

In turning to BWN's letter, we first find that he refers often to certain persons in local assemblies. He calls them "fellow laborers," "those who were watching over" the assembly, "those who might be however feebly watching over the saints," "the rulers in the church," "the church's guides," "Soltau and others here, who are watching over the saints," and "local overseers." He links "to reject the counsel" of these with "to disobey." By these expressions, it is pretty clear that BWN refers to those who take the lead and exercise oversight in a local assembly. It is his comments on such persons in responsibility that will be examined below.

BWN writes that a proposal was made that he "would consent to a general meeting of the saints being called, that Mr. Darby should there repeat his accusations, that I should defend myself, and the saints judge." His response to that proposal included the following remarks that bear on our topic:

... we had from the very first strenuously opposed the dissenting method of Church government, that the church was never regarded in scripture as holding the place either of a jury, or of a deliberative assembly, that they could not determine any matter except by voting. . . . As regards the general question it is very needful to distinguish the various senses in which we use the word "judge." The Church does not judge in the sense in which the House of Commons or a jury determines a question, but it does judge in the sense in which the Chief Justice judges when after the facts have been proved, he pronounces sentence according to the law, in which sense it is used in 1 Corinthians, the rulers in the church deliberate but the church acts.

Again the church has always a right to ask if it please for information. To inform the church is one thing, to make it a deliberative assembly is another. If the church has confidence in its guides, it may not care to enquire for itself into the facts of each particular case, but it has always a right to demand satisfaction on these points if it please. . . .

The proposal to tell me to come to the bar of the church and there to accuse another before the saints as a deliberative assembly (for this is one of [Sir Alexander] Campbell's proposals) is not only entirely contrary to scripture as regards the proper place of the church, but is the very principle which Popery has adopted to extend its tyranny over individual liberty. . . .

First, let us note that BWN presents no scripture to support his statement that the local church is not a "deliberative body," save a general reference in one place to 1 Cor. But there is a scripture that he could have pressed into his service. Acts 15:6 shows how "the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." Then in Acts 15:22 the whole church joined in the

action, having been excluded from the deliberations. Of course, there are no apostles left alive anymore to lend their authority to such a procedure. And most recognize that the book of Acts has a transitional character so that not all things written in it which an apostle and the elders approved were written so that we should do likewise (see Acts 21:18-25). Still, such a passage could, no doubt, have been used by BWN if he had only thought of it.

In the second place, BWN presents no arguments based on propriety and good manners. But he could have added that arguing over objections or discussing various tangential concerns before the whole assembly is improper because babes in Christ and others weak in the faith who might be easily stumbled would be more harmed than helped by a public deliberation before the whole assembly. Confusion and disorder are horrible to contemplate in connection with the assembly of God. So BWN could well have added such arguments as these.

Thirdly, it is unfortunate that BWN could not have appealed also to the authority of the local meeting of overseers or guides at Plymouth. This useful arrangement for minor difficulties and practical matters had lapsed at Plymouth at that time. JND claimed that BWN had systematically caused those who did not agree with him to stop coming to this meeting a few years previously, so a role for it in the troubles at Plymouth would have been a role, perhaps, that came in strongly on BWN's side.

On what grounds, then, does BWN's letter rest?

1. On the necessity of the saints to obey their leaders.
2. On a refusal of the notion of voting in the assembly.
3. On the conclusion that the only role for the assembly as such when gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is to pronounce the sentence previously determined by the elders. In his words, "the rulers in the church deliberate but the church acts."

Now whatever one may think of BWN's course, his understanding of the nature of the assembly and especially of the role of local elders as regards the making of assembly decisions is clearly stated in this short letter of two pages. Unfortunately, not all that JND wrote has the same virtues of clarity and brevity. However, in light of this clear position taken by BWN, JND's writings of 1846 can be scanned (they amount to most of volume 20 of his *Collected Writings*) to find his understanding also of the nature of the church as regards the making of assembly decisions. The papers of *Collected Writings* 20 include many many things not directly relevant to our purpose here. An attempt will be made, however, to display a representative selection of the portions most related to our subject.

Here then are JND's comparable thoughts from the same era:

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Now the presence of Jesus, though of course in Spirit, implies many associations of heart which His name peculiarly bears, and His authority too as Lord. But when met, the Holy Ghost is the acting power in every ministration which is not mere fleshly worthlessness. . . . The church is the habitation of God through the Spirit. It is by the Holy Ghost God dwells in the church, though He cannot be separated from the Father and the Son. It has been formally, and expressly, denied that the presence of the Holy Ghost should be looked for in the assembly. It has been perhaps affirmed too.<sup>1</sup>

Attention should be paid to the date of this extract from a long paper of JND about the troubles at Plymouth: September, 1846. That is to say, this is evidently and obviously (because of the statements made and their occasion and context) a part of his response to BWN's thoughts on the church as detailed above. Below the implications will be briefly traced in his own words.

First, then, we may note that JND opposes the position of BWN on this issue largely without reference to specific scriptures except Matt. 18:20. For example, there does not seem to be any discussion of Acts 15 in the first 202 pages of this volume of JND's *Collected Writings* (although all these pages take up the troubles at Plymouth). Perhaps, JND did not think of that passage either. Yet he does stress elsewhere in these pages that Paul does not appeal to elders at Corinth, mentioning this fact more than once. This is a powerful appeal to what the scripture teaches by omission. Moreover, later in the same volume 20, Acts 15 is taken up. In connection with the use of this chapter to support episcopal bishops, JND wrote:

There could not be stronger evidence against an individual superior authority in the churches, against episcopacy, than that which scripture affords. The only semblance of anything of the kind is James at Jerusalem: we find him closing the debate in Acts 15, and saying, "Wherefore my sentence is," etc. . . . We have thus clearly one who had great influence amongst the Jewish Christians, not always a happy one. It led Peter into dissimulation, Paul into the temple, so that his public ministry, as far as scripture goes, was closed. God may have overruled their effects and shown perfect and blessed grace -- assuredly He did; but so it was in fact. But in his history there is no trace of episcopal care.<sup>2</sup>

From this we may, perhaps, glean how he would have responded to any attempt at using Acts 15 to support BWN's views of the role of elders in church decisions. Acts 15 is, to him, not a "happy" example for the church.

In the second place, JND answers some fleshly thoughts about what might be proper or improper in church meetings for assembly discipline. He wrote:

It may be alleged that young saints are unfit to judge such things. I believe there are many things a young saint would, in these days, judge better than many an old one. But that is not the question. Individuals are not called on to judge as such. The objection brings out a further point -- the denial of the Holy Ghost acting in the body so as to guide it in a common act. And this is the real root of

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1. *Collected Writings* 20:23.

2. *Collected Writings* 20:308.

the whole matter.<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, JND did not write against the practice of private meetings of elders or guides or overseers, but neither did he claim that such meetings deliberated and that the assembly then pronounced the sentence agreed upon beforehand. On this particular point, more will be said below.

Let us turn then to JND's comments on the three main arguments of BWN that were listed above:

### 1. On the principle of obedience to elders in the church:

And now as to the circumstances connected with rule and authority. It is alleged that we are radicals, and look for democracy. I trust brethren will seek nothing but the guidance of God's blessed Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Further, I recognize that guides, elders if you please in principle, can inform and clear up the consciences of a body of Christians. . . . But to impose a verdict which cannot be debated is the most monstrous thing that ever was heard of. It is pure unmasked popery -- the clergy dictating to the conscience of the church, which can only register and give their weight to its decrees. Is the conscience of the church to be disposed of thus by others, be they ever so wise? A thing may be urged on the church, insisted on; let it be that rebuke be given; but it is always to *bring the conscience of the church* up to the right level. This Paul did with Corinth, where, note, elders never appear at all; but he never acts for them without it. "You have proved *yourselves* clear in this matter." This is the principle the apostle goes on. No doubt he could guide and rebuke them too, and tell them that he had judged the case already; but to impose a verdict on their consciences they could not debate, not an apostle even attempts. How could that be proving *themselves* clear? It is monstrous. No one who reads scripture can question, however weak we may be now, that there were guides, leaders, who watched for souls as accountable to do it, men of reputation, and at that time appointed elders. But it is a very different thing to govern, or rule, or guide the church, which is scriptural, and to govern instead of and for the church, which is popish . . . And even so the apostle declares he was as a nursing mother with the saints. And the government of the church is not a setting of points right, but of souls right, and therefore nothing is done unless the conscience of the church is carried into the act.<sup>5</sup>

From this we may conclude that passing the verdict through a meeting of elders or guides or through a brothers' meeting first and subsequently demanding that the church ratify the verdict without deliberation would have surely appeared to JND as just another "monstrous" notion.

### 2. On the notion of voting in the church:

And now as to the dissenters' principle. . . . the principle here alluded to, I believe should be utterly and entirely rejected, for the same reason that I reject that here proposed, namely, that the presence of the Spirit in the body is not owned by it. Among the dissenters they vote, and though there may be happy unanimity, and the Lord guide them, as I doubt not He often may, yet they do vote on the questions, and a majority determines the matter. Now it is quite evident a minority *may* be

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3. *Collected Writings* 20:79.

4. *Collected Writings* 20:24-5.

5. *Collected Writings* 20:140.

the most spiritual. In the case of Corinth all, as far as appears in public, were gone wrong, and allowed, and were puffed up about, evil. A majority, judging *as such*, cannot be said to have the Holy Ghost guiding them, because they are a majority. This is quite manifest. It is a mere human principle, such as the world is obliged to act on, because it has no other way of getting out of its difficulties. But the church of God has. It has the presence and guidance of the Holy Ghost. The dissenting principle (for I doubt not in practice they are often guided by the Spirit according to the grace of the gospel), their *principle*, I say, denied this presence and guidance; they acted on another. The brethren believed this guidance of God could be reckoned upon. Hence they denied the necessity of the other human extreme -- the popish one of a clergy settling the matter among themselves, and announcing it publicly, and the church having nothing to do but add its weight by its acts to a decision pronounced by the authority of others, which they were bound to receive implicitly, and as a conclusion arrived at for them, which could not be debated.

The brethren denied the necessity of this alternative. They affirmed that the presence of the Spirit of God was in the church, and that He would guide them in the faithful love of Christ to a right mind; that it might require, especially in the present state of things, patience, humble waiting upon God in the sense of weakness, a working out as in the *absence* of apostolic power, with fear and trembling; but they believed that it could be because GOD worked in them to will and to do. They did not deny in the least that there were those among them, who through greater spiritual wisdom and maturity could help and guide them in this -- it would have been quarrelling with their own mercies; nor would they refuse the help and godly assistance of any brother of spiritual attainments and wisdom from elsewhere -- it would have been resisting the unity of the Spirit and body, and God's authority in the church, and the common comfort of the saints, the increase of God by what every joint supplied. They might not see clearly all at once, and they would have to wait in any given case; but they believed in the faithfulness of the Lord to guide them. Their being obliged to wait might show them the failure of their own state of conscience in spiritual power and do them good. Now the principle of these Plymouth leaders denies all this. It declares positively and openly here, that this is the alternative, either the dissenting principle of debating, voting, and majorities, or a verdict imposed by the clergy without any debate at all. That is, *they entirely deny the guidance of the body by the Holy Ghost -- His practical presence there* -- the very point as to this, which the brethren were called out of God to bear witness to, alike against the dissenting and popish principles.

### 3. On the church "acting" without debate:

The guides pass the verdict; the body are to register it without a debate. The judgment of their consciences is in the hands of a self-appointed clergy. I can well suppose this reply to the plain and evident truth of the case: "We do not deny the presence of the Spirit in the body. But, God having put this office into the hands of those who have addicted themselves to the ministry, the proof of the Spirit being in the body is their submission \* <sup>7</sup> to the judgment of those whom God has placed

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6. *Collected Writings* 20:142-144.

7. \*I say *submission*, not *accordance*, because if they cannot call it in question, it is idle to call it *accordance*. Paul leads the *body* to act, however decided *he* was, by divine light. . . . And again note, that there is no question of elders in 1 Corinthians at all. Paul addresses himself to the body. I doubt not he did it of God, to guard this very point, and show the conscience of the

(continued...)

over them. And thus the verdict is the verdict of the body by the Spirit." This is what is claimed (page 12), "This the church does: it debates its verdict, we believe, through those of its members capacitated by God for such service." Now this is exactly popery. The verdict *there* is alleged to be the verdict of the church, and the body are called upon ["required"] to act, and do act, as a body upon it. But it is arrived at by the clergy. It is in vain to say that it is presented, on these new principles, to the body when arrived at, which the Roman clergy do not. Even admitting this, the body cannot debate it. In this particular case, in tea-meetings in private, \*<sup>8</sup> they were allowed to question Mr. Newton. And this is called in to screen the flagrancy of the principle. The exclusive nature of the meetings is too barefaced to call it the action of the church. Were it so, the principle is *wholly abandoned*. The church *question and examine Mr. Newton*; and suppose someone had said, "Well, now we should like to hear the other side too; let us call Mr. Darby, Mr. H., and Mr. R--e, and Mr. S--s." "Oh no," is the answer, "the church cannot hear witnesses, and debate its verdict." Would not any honest man in the world be ashamed to be associated with such a transaction? Would not any spiritual one have revolted against calling such a thing the acting of the church of God, as an insult against God Himself? I have been obliged to notice this, because otherwise it would have been alleged that it *was* brought before the saints in the right way. Now, either they were forced to hear one side only, and there was liberty only for that, or they would hear witnesses; and this is what is refused them. Besides, after all, they must not debate their verdict. They must take what is given them. For, supposing that they are dissatisfied with the verdict stated, what can they do? Debate it before they make it theirs? No, this is positively refused. Examine witnesses? No, this is denied them. What then? Submit, or leave. \*<sup>9</sup> The answer will be, "But God is with His church; and He will guide the leaders into a right judgment, and they will only propose clear evident cases." That is, the clergy are not only to be guides but infallible guides, for *they* have come to the conclusion, which is to be taken to be by the leading of God Himself. If the verdict be undebatable, it certainly *ought* to be infallible.

Is debate to be desired then? \*<sup>10</sup> It is just this alternative which is denied. The conscience of the church must be satisfied, for it to act for God and before God. If it is not, the conscience of the body is not clear. It may be gracious to do some act not yet done. It may be right, at the suggestion of some, nay, one godly brother, to prosecute the inquiry farther by the persons who originally inquired, as I have seen done at Plymouth. God is in the assembly without having any debate

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(...continued)

body, the state of that conscience, to be the very point, the real matter in question. . .

8. \* . . They declare positively the church has *itself searched* into it, when the leaders have announced the verdict.

9. In fact, . . . not one [of these meetings] took place but led to the secession of some half-dozen persons . . .

10. \* The word *debate* is just used as alarming a quiet godly conscientious mind -- innocent in the hands of the leaders where it is assumed to be a godly spiritual weighing of the matter, and implying a discussion in the case of the assembly; but, guides or assembly, the godly weighing together before God what is His will where our conscience is concerned, is *debate* neither in one nor the other.

at all. \* <sup>11</sup> The Holy Ghost may there [in the assembly] suggest some step not yet thought of, the neglect of which would destroy the weight of the judgment, even if a right one. It is specially when speaking of discipline, and looking to the Lord for producing the unity of mind of two or three, that the Lord says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." <sup>12</sup>

On what grounds, then, did JND stand? On the necessity of the assembly to clear itself by the exercise of its collective conscience as an assembly, on the necessity of the assembly to look to the presence of the Holy Spirit for guidance and power in such action, and on the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst as the authority for the actions of the assembly as such. Let the reader judge.

In conclusion, let us go back to the letter of BWN, with which we began, and listen to his account of the deeds of Sir Alexander Campbell. When BWN refused the proposal that JND's accusation be brought before the whole church as a deliberative body, he explained himself to Sir Alexander Campbell in person and the letter quoted above gives the substance of that very same conversation. They were interrupted at the end of BWN's explanation of his understanding of church truth and the role of elders in assembly discipline, but the next day they met again in the presence of Lord Congleton. The letter reads that the conversation continued then:

"by Campbell's saying that although he did not concur with Darby in his charges yet that he should withdraw on the ground of differing from us as to the mode of church government."

Think of that! He did not agree with Darby's accusation. So it was not matters of conduct or of who-said-what or who-did-what or what-procedure-is-proper that moved him. No, but he was going to withdraw from fellowship with BWN on ecclesiastical grounds, on the question of the "mode of church government." Is it really going too far to say that Sir Alexander Campbell must have felt that the two views of the role of elders in assembly decisions set forth above were sufficiently different so that one could not with a good conscience remain in fellowship with both? could not stay in fellowship with one while convinced that the other was correct?

Of course, he could have meant more by his words than is evident to us on the surface of BWN's report. There could have been other facts that weighed on his mind. But I do not really think so (although some other facets of the controversy may have tended to the same practical result). And he himself said that his decision to withdraw was made *in spite of the fact that he expressly did not concur with JND's other charges*. What were these other charges? "He was

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11. \* As a fact, it may be well to notice, that there was a good deal of debate, on subjects involving a mixture of discipline and principle, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles -- debate which Paul (for so God ordered it for larger purposes of His wisdom and grace) himself could not terminate.

12. *Collected Writings* 20:144-146.

accused, to state it in few words, of clericalism, sectarianism, and untruth." *Collected Writings* 20:160) So Sir Alexander Campbell did not have to wait to see if BWN were guilty of these other (serious) charges before he decided to withdraw: the very ground taken by BWN in the letter quoted above was sufficient for him *apart from the other evils JND asserted were allowed at Plymouth* because, no doubt, *the issue of the role of elders in the making of assembly decisions in matters of discipline displays the very ground upon which an assembly is standing*. And he *did* withdraw from fellowship with BWN! JND wrote:

Sir A. C. . . . did not break bread any longer.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, this interpretation depends on our taking BWN's testimony about Sir Alexander Campbell's words at face value. Still, if we believe him, then we may conclude that Sir Alexander Campbell has left us a good example.

Dennis P. Ryan, 1992

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13. *Collected Writings* 20:135, first published in Dec. 1846 or shortly thereafter.





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