

28

FIVE LETTERS

ON

WORSHIP AND MINISTRY

IN

THE SPIRIT.

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“ALL THESE WORKETH THAT ONE AND THE SELF-SAME SPIRIT,  
DIVIDING TO EVERY MAN SEVERALLY AS HE WILL.”  
1 Cor. xii. 11.

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## TO THE READER.

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THE following Letters were several years ago addressed to an assembly of Christians, with whom the writer had peculiar local ties of service and affection, by which he was emboldened to communicate very freely with his brethren on subjects of deep mutual interest. He has often since been importuned to publish the Letters; but this request he has always hitherto declined, from a fear lest that which was applicable to a given assembly in a certain state, might not be so well adapted to the need of other Christian assemblies, whose condition might be very different. He shrunk, moreover, from the very appearance of taking, among his brethren generally, a place not even locally assumed by him, and cheerfully accorded by those among whom it had been his joy and privilege to labour in the Lord. Both these objections have been overruled by learning that manuscript copies of the Letters have found their way to many localities—a sort of semi-publication to which there are, in conscience, very grave objections. The facilities afforded by circulating manuscripts for the undetected diffusion of deadly error, are surely enough

to make those who care for souls jealous of such a mode of disseminating truth. The following Letters are, for this reason, sent to the press. Any circulation they may have will thus be open: their statements may be subjected to the test of God's holy word; and should they be found to contain anything contrary thereto, no one will be more grateful than the writer for the correction of his mistakes, by that pure and perfect standard of truth.

Fifteen years' chequered experiences in the position and path to which these Letters apply, have only served to deepen the conviction, that, however man may have failed, the path and position are both of God. What we need is patience, faith in the living God, love to Christ, true subjection to the Spirit, diligent occupation with the word, and unfeigned subjection one to another in the fear of God.

It only needs to be added, that, in preparing for the press, the freedom has been used to make any alterations required by present light on scripture, as well as to omit or change any expressions which would have indicated the particular assembly to which the Letters were addressed.

As they are, they are commended to the blessing of God and the consciences of saints.

W. T.

*London, December, 1857.*

# LETTERS

ON

## WORSHIP AND MINISTRY,

ETC.

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### LETTER I.

#### GOD PRESENT IN THE ASSEMBLY.

BELoved BRETHREN,—There are several points connected with our position, as gathered together in the name of Jesus, as to which I feel it on my heart to communicate with you. I take this mode of doing so, as affording you better opportunity individually to examine, and maturely to weigh, what is communicated, than you would be likely to have in a free conversation where all were present. I should be very thankful for this latter, should the Lord incline your hearts to it, when you have examined and weighed, in His presence, the matters I have to put before you.

One word at the outset, in acknowledgment of God's mercy to us, as gathered in the name of Jesus. I can but bow my head and worship, in remembrance of the many seasons of real refreshing, and unfeigned joy, He has given us together in His presence. The recollection of these seasons, while it bows the heart before

God, renders each one with whom such mercies have been enjoyed unspeakably dear. The bond of the Spirit is a real bond; and it is in the confidence which He inspires in my brethren's love, that I would, as your brother, and as your servant for Christ's sake, express without reserve what seems to me of deep importance to our continued happiness and associated profit, as well as to what is of far greater moment, the glory of Him in whose name we are gathered.

When in July last we were led of the Lord, as I doubt not, to substitute open meetings for the Lord's day evening gospel preachings, which had been sustained till then, I anticipated all which has since ensued. I may say that the result has not disappointed me in the least. There are lessons as to the practical guidance of the Holy Ghost which can only be learned practically; and much that may now, by the Lord's blessing, commend itself to your spiritual understanding, and to your consciences, would then have been quite unintelligible, from your unacquaintance with the kind of meetings to which such truth applies. It is often said that experience is the best teacher. This may, perhaps, be questioned, and rightly so; but there can be no question that experience makes us conscious of wants which divine teaching alone supplies. You will believe me, that it is no joy to me, in itself, to find my brethren mutually dissatisfied with the part taken by each other in the meetings. But if this state of things should be overruled, as I trust it may be, to the opening all our hearts to lessons from God's word, which we could not otherwise so well have learned, this at least will be matter for thankfulness and joy.

The doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in "the body, the Church," and, as the sure consequence, His presence and supremacy in the assemblies of the saints, has for a good many years now appeared to my own soul, if not *the great* truth of the dispensation, yet surely *one of the most momentous* truths by which the present period is distinguished. The virtual or actual denial of it constitutes one of the most serious features of the apostacy which has taken place. The sense of this does not abate with me, but rather deepens as time rolls on. I do freely confess to you, that with the full acknowledgment that there are beloved children of God in all the denominations around, and with every desire to keep my heart open to them all, I could no more have fellowship with any body of professing Christians who substitute clerisy in any of its forms, for the sovereign guidance of the Holy Ghost, than, as an Israelite, I could have had fellowship with the setting up of a golden calf in the place of the living God. That this has been done, and that throughout Christendom, and that for this, along with other sins, judgment is impending over Christendom, one can but sorrowfully own, and take the shame of it before God, as having all had to do with it, and as being one body in Christ with numbers who to this day glory in it. But the difficulties which attend a place of separation from this evil, and which we are all beginning to feel, (as we ought surely to have anticipated,) have no such effect with me, as to weaken the sense of the evil from which God has in his mercy separated us; and they awaken within me no desire to return to that kind of human, official place and power, the assertion of

which for a distinct class, characterizes the professing world, and is fast hastening on the judgment by which the professing world will ere long be visited.

But, beloved brethren, while our conviction of the truth and importance of the *doctrine* of the Holy Spirit's presence cannot be too profound, let me beseech you to remember, that the presence of the Holy Ghost in the assemblies of the saints is itself A FACT. It is simple faith in this we need. We are prone to forget this. And forgetfulness of this, or ignorance of it, is the main cause of our ever coming together without profit to our souls. If we did but come together to meet God; if we did but believe when we are assembled that He is really present, what an effect this must have on our souls! The fact is, that as really as Christ *was* present with his disciples on the earth, *so really is the Holy Ghost now present in the assemblies of the saints.* If in any way His presence could be manifested to our senses,—if we could see Him as the disciples did see Jesus,—how would our souls be solemnized and subdued. What deep stillness, what reverent attention, what solemn waiting on Him, would be the result. How impossible that there could be any haste, or rivalry, or restlessness, if the presence of the Holy Ghost were to be thus revealed to sight and sense. And is the fact of His presence to be less influential because it is a matter of *faith* instead of *sight*? Is He any less really present because unseen? It is the poor world that receives Him not, because it does not see Him; and shall we take its place and forsake our own? “And I will pray the Father for you,” says Jesus, “and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with



you for ever: even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: BUT YE KNOW HIM, for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." (John xiv. 16, 17.)

"*But ye know him.*" Would that we did, beloved! More and more am I persuaded, that our great lack is that of faith in His personal presence. Have there not been times when His presence has been realized as a fact? and how blessed were such seasons! There might be, and there were, intervals of silence; but how were they occupied? In solemn waiting upon God. Not in restless anxiety, as to who was next to speak or pray; not in turning over the leaves of Bibles or hymn books to find something that we thought suitable. No! nor in anxious thoughts about those who were lookers on, wondering what they would think of the silence that existed. God was there. Each heart was engaged with Him; and for any to have broken silence, for the sake of doing so, would have been felt to be an interruption indeed. When silence was broken, it was with a prayer that embodied the desires, and expressed the breathings of all present; or a hymn in which all could with fulness of heart unite; or a word which came home to our hearts with power. And though several might be used in such hymns, and prayers, and ministrations, it was as evidently *one Spirit* who guided and arranged the whole, as though a plan of it had been made before-hand, and each one had had his part assigned. No human wisdom could have made such a plan. The harmony was divine. It was the Holy Ghost acting by the several members, in their several

places, to express the worship, or to meet the need of all present.

And why should it not be always thus? I would repeat it, beloved brethren, the presence of the Holy Ghost is a fact, not merely a doctrine. And surely if in fact He be present when we are assembled together, no fact can compare in importance with this. It is surely the grand, the all-absorbing fact, from which everything besides in the meeting ought to derive its character. It is not a mere negation. That the Holy Ghost is present, means more than that the meeting is not to be ordered by human and previous arrangement. *He* must order it if *He* be present. It means more than that any one is at liberty to take part in it. *Nay, it means the opposite of this.* True, there must be no human restrictions: but if He be present, no one must take any part but that which He assigns, and for which He qualifies him. Liberty of ministry is liberty for the Holy Ghost to act by whomsoever He will. But we are not the Holy Ghost: and if the usurpation of His place by one person be so intolerable, what shall be said to the usurpation of His place by a number of persons acting because there is liberty to act, not because they know it to be the present mind of the Spirit that they should act as they do? Real faith in the personal presence of the Holy Ghost would set these things right. It is not that one would desire silence for its own sake, or that any should be restrained from taking part by the mere presence of this or that brother. I would rather myself that there were all sorts of disorder, so as for the real state of things to come out, than have this repressed by the presence of an

individual. What one does desire is, that the presence of the Holy Ghost himself should be so realized as that no one should break silence except by His power, and under His direction; and that the sense of His presence should thus restrain us from all that is unworthy of Him, and of the name of Jesus in which we meet.

Under another dispensation we read such an exhortation as the following, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few." (Eccl. v. 1, 2.) Surely, if the grace wherein we stand has given us greater freedom of access to God than this, we are not to use such freedom as an excuse for irreverence and haste. The actual presence among us of God the Holy Ghost should certainly be as urgent a motive to reverence and godly fear, as the consideration that God is in heaven, and we upon the earth. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. xii. 28, 29.)

Hoping to resume the subject, I am, dear brethren,  
Your unworthy servant in Christ,

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## LETTER II.

## THE CHURCH EDIFIED BY GIFTS.

BELoved BRETHREN,—In resuming the subject on which I lately wrote to you, I would present you with the following extract from a tract, written at least nine or ten years ago. The author, if I am rightly informed, is one who has been greatly honoured of God amongst us, and who is known personally to most of you. The tract is in the form of a dialogue.

“*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, 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 neighbour for good to edification,’ the Holy Ghost has not fitted him to speak, and he is dishonouring 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 mis-spent 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 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 Cor. xiv. 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 xiii. 1, I see that at Antioch there were but five whom the Holy Ghost recognised 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 a *stated* ministry. But it was not an *exclusive* ministry : for when Judas and Silas came (xv. 32), they were pleased to take their place among the others, and then the recognized teachers were more numerous.

“ *E.* And what connexion would this have with the giving out of a Psalm, &c., 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.”

Such is the light in which this subject was viewed by one known, as I believe, to most of you,—one of the earliest labourers among those who, for twenty years and upwards, have been seeking to meet in the name of Jesus. In further confirmation of the main thought in the above extract,—viz., that God never designed all saints to take part in the public ministry of the word, or in conducting the worship of the assembly, I would refer you, first, to 1 Cor. xii. 29, 30. “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” There would be no meaning in these questions, if the fact had not been self-evident, that such places in the body were filled by but a few. The apostle had just said, “And God hath set *some* in the Church: first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles,” &c. And then he says, “Are all apostles?” and so on. Thus we find in the very portion of scripture which most largely treats of the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost, in the bestowal and use of gifts in the Body, the Church; in the very portion which is always referred to, and justly, in proof that liberty of ministry is what God has established in His Church; in this very portion we are told that all were not gifted persons, but that God had set *some* in the Body; enumerating the different orders and kinds of gifts by which they were distinguished.

Will you turn now for a moment to Ephesians iv.? Questions have been raised as to 1 Cor. xii. and xiv.,

whether it be possible to act on the principles there laid down, in the acknowledged absence of so many of the gifts there enumerated. I have no such questions myself, and as to any who have, I should only ask them, What other principles have we in Scripture whereon to act? And then, if there be no others, What authority have we to act on principles which are not found in Scripture at all? But there can be no such question as to Eph. iv. 8-13. "Wherefore, he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men . . . . and he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." And you will observe, too, that they are given until the Church is completed. As long as Christ has a Body on earth needing the service of such men, He bestows on them the gifts of His love, for the nourishing and cherishing of His Body, His Bride—"Till we all come," &c.

It is thus by the ministry of living men, whose place and calling it is to minister, that Christ cares for and feeds His flock—that the Holy Ghost works in the Body which He inhabits. These men, it is true, may work at their trades. Paul was a tent-maker. And they may be very far from any pretensions to clerical, official place and dignity: the further the better. But still they are Christ's provision for the edification of His saints; yea, and for the calling in of souls; and the true wisdom of the saints is to discern such gifts of Christ where they have been bestowed, and to own them in the place which He has assigned



them in His Body. To own them thus, is to own Him; to refuse to do so, is both to wrong ourselves, and to dishonour Him.

Be it remembered, too, that it is in the Body, the whole Body, God has set these gifts: it is on the whole Body Christ has bestowed them; and we are not the whole Body. Suppose the Church had still been manifestly one, as it was in the apostles' days; even then, it is quite possible that the Church in one place might be without an evangelist, and in another without a pastor or teacher; while in some places there might be more than one of each. But now that the Church is so divided and scattered, how much more true is this of the little companies here and there, who have been gathered in the name of Jesus. Has the Lord Jesus ceased to care for His Church, because of its torn, divided state? God forbid. Has He ceased then to manifest His care by the bestowal of suitable and needed gifts? By no means. But then it is in the unity of the whole Body they are found. And we need to remember this. All saints in \_\_\_\_\_ form the Church of God in the place; and there may be evangelists, and pastors and teachers among those members of the Body who are still in the Church of England, or among the Methodists or the Dissenters. And what benefit do we derive from their ministry? or what benefit do the saints with them derive from any of Christ's gifts which are amongst us?

Why do I bring this forward? To press upon you this point, beloved brethren, that if among the seventy or eighty who meet in the Lord's name at \_\_\_\_\_ there be none who are His gifts according to Eph. iv.,

or if there be but two or three such, the circumstance of our meeting as we do will not of itself increase their number. A brother who is not made a pastor or evangelist by Christ Himself, *does not become one by beginning to meet where the presence of the Holy Ghost and liberty of ministry are recognised.* And if, because there is liberty from all human restrictions, those begin to assume the place, or act in the character of teachers, pastors, or evangelists, who have not been given as such by Christ to His Church, will edification be the result? No, but confusion; and "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." If we have not such gifts among us, let us own our poverty: if we have two or three, let us be thankful, own them in the place God has given them, and pray for more and better gifts and ministries. But let us not suppose that the activities of any whom Christ the Lord has not set in such a place will supply the lack of gifts like these. The only effect of such activities is to grieve the Spirit, and hinder His actings by those whom He would otherwise use in service to the saints.

One happy thought arises before me, in drawing this second letter to a close. If we were not in a position answering to what we find in Scripture, such questions could hardly arise amongst us. Where all is settled and arranged by some human system; where officers, appointed by a bishop, a conference, or a congregation, attend to the routine of duties prescribed for them by the rules under which they act, questions like these have no existence. The very difficulties of our position prove, by their character, that the position itself

is of God. Yes, and God who has brought us into it by His Spirit through the word is all-sufficient, and will not fail us in the difficulties, but guide us through them, to our profit and His own praise. Only let us be simple, humble, and unassuming. Let us not pretend to more than we have, or to do that for which God has not qualified us. Some points of detail I reserve for another letter.

Meanwhile, I remain,

Affectionately yours in Christ Jesus,

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### LETTER III.

HOW TO DISTINGUISH THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT.

NEGATIVE MARKS.

BELOVED BRETHREN,—There are two points on which I desire to make myself distinctly understood, ere entering on the special subject of my present letter. First, as to the difference between ministry and worship. I here use the word worship in its largest sense, of every kind of address from man to God, whether prayer, confession, or what is, *more properly speaking*, worship, namely—adoration, thanksgiving, and praise. The essential difference between worship and ministry is, that in the one, man speaks to God; in the other, God speaks by His servants to men. Our only and all-sufficient title to worship is the all-abounding grace of God, which has brought us nigh by the blood of Jesus; so nigh as to know and worship Him as our Father; so nigh as to be kings and priests to God. In

this all saints are alike. The feeblest and the strongest, the most experienced and the veriest babe are all alike in this. The most gifted servant of Christ has no better title to draw near to God than the weakest saint among those to whom he ministers. To suppose the contrary would be to do what has been so largely done throughout Christendom, viz.—to institute an order of priests between the Church and God. One great High Priest we have. The only priesthood besides His, which exists at present, is that which all saints share, and which all share alike. I could not suppose, therefore, that in an assembly of Christians the giving out of hymns, and prayer, thanksgiving, and praise (the expression of these I mean), should be confined to those who are qualified of God to teach, or to exhort, or to preach the gospel. God the Holy Ghost may use others of the saints to give out a hymn which really expresses the present worship of the hearts of those assembled; or He may use them in prayers which really express the present need and desires of those whose mouth they profess to be. And if God be pleased so to act, what are we that we should say Him nay? Still, while these exercises cannot be confined to gifted persons, they must surely be subject to the present guidance of the Holy Ghost; and they all come within the range of those principles laid down in 1 Cor. xiv. such as that everything must be in order and to edification.

Ministry, that is ministry of the word—ministry in which God speaks by his servants to men—is the result of a special deposit with the individual of a gift or gifts, for the use of which he is responsible to Christ.

Our title to worship is that in which we are all *alike*. The responsibility to minister flows from that in which we *differ*. "Having then gifts DIFFERING according to the grace that is given to us." (Rom. xii. 6.) This of itself establishes the difference I refer to between ministry and worship.

The other point is, as to liberty of ministry. The true, scriptural idea of liberty of ministry, not only includes liberty for the exercise of gifts, but also for the development of them. It implies that we so meet in the recognition of the Spirit's presence and supremacy, as to present no hindrance to *His acting* by whomsoever He will; and it is quite clear that in the first development of gift, it must be His acting by those who have not been previously so used of Him at all. Any principle which would interfere with this would, as it seems to me, be alike subversive of the Church's privileges, and of the Holy Spirit's rights. But, then, it must at once be obvious, that if saints meet together thus, on ground which leaves scope for the Holy Spirit to lead to a hymn by one, prayer by another, or word of exhortation or doctrine by a third; and if room must be left for the Spirit to develop, as well as to use, gifts for the edifying of the body, this cannot be done without affording opportunity for forwardness and self-sufficiency to act without any guidance of the Spirit at all. Hence the importance of knowing how to distinguish between that which is of the flesh, and that which is of the Spirit. I shrink greatly from the hackneyed use of such terms as "ministry in the flesh," and "ministry in the Spirit;" and yet there is all-important truth embodied in those

expressions, soberly used. In each Christian there are two fountains of thought, feeling, motive, word, and action, and these are denominated in scripture "flesh" and "Spirit." The part we take in the assemblies of the saints may flow from one of these sources, or from the other. It is most important rightly to distinguish between them. It is most important for those who take part in the meetings, whether statedly or occasionally, to judge themselves as to this. It is important for all saints, seeing that we are exhorted to "try the spirits;" and on the assembly must rest eventually the responsibility of owning what is of God, and of discouraging and discountenancing what proceeds from any other source.

It is to some of the broad and principal landmarks, by which we may distinguish the guidance of the Spirit from fleshly counterfeits and pretensions, that I would now solicit your attention. And first, I would mention several things which are *not* a warrant for our taking part in conducting the meetings of the saints.

The mere circumstance of there being liberty to act is no warrant for acting. This is so self-evident that nothing need be said to prove it; and yet we need to be reminded of it. The fact that there is no formal hindrance to any one taking part in the meeting, renders it possible for those whose only qualification is that they can read, to take up a principal part of the time in reading chapter after chapter, and hymn after hymn. Of course, any child who has been taught to read can do this; and there are few amongst us, indeed, who cannot conduct the meetings, if ability to read hymns and chapters be all the qualification that is

requisite. But while it is easy enough to read a chapter, to know which is the right one to read, and which is the right time to read it, is quite another matter. It is easy enough to give out a hymn, but to give out the hymn which really embodies and expresses the worship of the saints, is what only can be done by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I confess to you, my brethren, when some time ago (not lately, thank God), we had five or six chapters read, and as many hymns sung, around the Lord's table, and, perhaps, not more than one prayer or giving of thanks, it did occur to me whether we had met to improve ourselves in reading and singing, or to show forth the Lord's death. I do unfeignedly bless God, that there has been improvement in this respect for months back; still it may be well for us to bear in mind, that while there is liberty to take a part in the meetings, the existence of an opportunity to take part is no warrant for so doing.

That no one else is doing anything at the time, is not sufficient warrant for taking part in the meeting. Silence for its own sake cannot be too much deprecated. It may become as complete a form as anything else. But silence is better than what is said or done merely to break the silence. I know well what it is to think of a good many persons present who are not in communion, perhaps not believers, and to feel uneasy at the silence on their account. Where this commonly or often occurs, it may be a call from God for an entirely different kind of meeting; but it can never authorize any one to speak, or pray, or give out a hymn, for the mere sake of something being done.

Again, one's individual state and experiences are no

certain guides, as to any part we may take in meetings of the saints. A hymn may have been very sweet to my own soul, or I may have been present where it has been sung with great enjoyment of the Lord's presence. I am not to conclude from this that it is my place to give out the hymn at the next meeting I attend. There may be no suitability in it to the present state of the assembly. It may not be the mind of the Spirit that a hymn should be sung at all. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." (James v. 13.) The hymn must be expressive of what those assembled feel, or there is no sincerity in their joining to sing it. And who, but He who knows the actual state of the assembly can guide to a hymn expressive of that state? Then as to prayer: when one prays in the assembly, it is as the vehicle for the expression of its wants and its requests. I may have burdens of my own to cast on the Lord in prayer, which it would be very improper for me to name in the assembly. The only effect, probably, would be to drag down all my brethren to a level with myself. On the other hand, my own soul may be thoroughly happy with the Lord; if that be not the state of the assembly as such, it is only by identifying myself with the actual state of the assembly, that I shall be enabled to present its requests before God. That is to say, if I am led by the Spirit to pray in the assembly, it will not be as in my closet, where none are present but the Lord and myself; and my own wants and my own enjoyments form the proper subjects of prayer and thanksgiving; but I shall be enabled to offer such prayers, and make such con-



fessions, and present such thanksgivings, as are suited to the actual state of those whose mouth I become, in thus addressing God. There cannot be a much greater mistake than to suppose that self, and what relates to self, is to be our guide in conducting the meetings of the saints. A portion of scripture may have interested my own soul greatly, and I may have profited by it; it does not follow that I am to read it at the Lord's table, or in other meetings of the saints. Some particular subject may be occupying my own attention greatly; and it may be well for my own soul that it should do so; but it may not be at all the subject to which God would have the attention of the saints generally drawn. You will observe, I am not denying that we may ourselves have been especially occupied and exercised by subjects which God would have us bring before the saints. Perhaps this is often, or even commonly, the case with God's servants; but what I would affirm is, that this, *of itself*, is no sufficient guidance. We ourselves may have necessities which the saints generally have not; and they may need what would not meet our own case.

Suffer me to add, that the Spirit would never lead me to give out hymns, because they are expressive of my own peculiar views. There may be points of interpretation on which saints meeting together do not see eye to eye. If, in such a case, hymns be chosen by those of one opinion for the purpose of expressing it—however good and true the hymns may be—it is impossible that the others can join to sing them, and discord instead of harmony is produced at once. The hymns to which the Spirit of God leads us in joint

worship, will be the expression of that in which all are agreed who unite in the act. At all times, but in the assembly at all events, let us endeavour to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And let us remember that the way to do this is to walk "in all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love."

Here, let me recall to your minds, that in singing, prayer, or worship of any kind, it is the assembly, whoever may be its mouth or organ, that speaks to God. It therefore can never be truly or sincerely beyond the state of the assembly, but must be expressive of it. True indeed, blessed be God, He may by the Spirit strike a higher note, with which immediately all hearts chord, and so the tone of united worship be raised; and this He often does. But if the assembly be not in a state to respond at once to such a key-note of praise, there can be nothing much more painful than for an individual to go on with exalted strains of thanksgiving and adoration, when all other hearts are sad and cold, wandering and distracted. The one who utters the worship of the assembly must have the hearts of the assembly with him, or there is no reality in what takes place. On the other hand, ministry, being God's voice to us, may be ever so much in advance of our state. It is an individual speaking as God's mouth, and if it be really so, it will often be to minister truth we have not as yet received, or to recall to us truths which have ceased to act in present power on our souls. How evident, that in either case, and in every case, it must be the Spirit of God who guides.

As to what distinguishes the positive guidance of the Spirit, I find I must leave it for still another letter. The negative part alone has been presented in this.

Yours, beloved brethren,  
Affectionately in Christ Jesus,

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## LETTER IV.

### HOW TO DISTINGUISH THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE ASSEMBLY.

#### POSITIVE MARKS.

**BELoved BRETHREN,**—The man who would attempt to define the Spirit's operations in the quickening or conversion of a soul, would but betray his own ignorance, and be denying, moreover, that sovereignty of the Spirit which is declared in the well-known words, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." And yet Scripture abounds with marks, whereby it may be discerned who are born of the Spirit and who are not. So as to the subject of this letter. I hope to be kept from so usurping the place of the Holy Spirit, as to presume in any way nicely to define the manner of His operations on the souls of those whom He leads to take part in the worship of the assembly, or in ministering to the saints. It may be in some cases much more direct and sensible (to the individual I mean) than in others. But however vain

and presumptuous it might be to attempt nicely and accurately to define on such a subject, Scripture gives us ample instruction as to what are the marks of true ministry. And it is to some of the plainer and more obvious marks that I wish now to solicit your attention. Some of them apply to the matter or substance of what is ministered, and others to the motives which induce us to minister, or to take any part in conducting the meetings of the saints. Some will afford a test to those who do thus act, whereby they may judge themselves; others will furnish to all saints criteria whereby to judge what is of the Spirit, and what from other sources. Some will serve to show who are Christ's gifts to His Church, for the ministry of the word; and others may aid those who really are so, as to the important question when to speak and when to be silent. My soul trembles to think of the responsibility of writing on such a subject. But my comfort is, that one's "sufficiency is of God," and that "Scripture 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." Let all I may write be tested by this all-sufficient standard; and if anything will not bear this test, God grant you, beloved brethren, wisdom and grace to reject it.

The guidance of the Spirit is not by blind impulses and unintelligent impressions, but by filling the spiritual understanding with God's thoughts as revealed in the written word, and by acting on the renewed affections. In early days, there were indeed God's gifts which might be, in their use, unconnected with spiri-

tual intelligence. I refer to the gift of tongues, where there was no interpreter. And it would appear that because this gift seemed more marvellous in men's eyes than the others, the Corinthians were fond of using and displaying it. For this the apostle rebukes them. "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all; yet, in the Church, I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." (1 Cor. xiv. 18-20.) The least, then, that can be looked for in those who minister, is acquaintance with the Scripture, the understanding of God's mind as revealed in the word. There may be this, observe, without any gift of utterance, without any capacity to communicate it to others. But without this, what have we to communicate? God's saints are surely not assembled from time to time in the name of Jesus, to have crude and undigested human thoughts presented to them, or to have retailed to them what others have spoken or written. Personal acquaintance with God's word, familiarity with Scripture, understanding of its contents, is surely essential to the ministry of the word. "Jesus saith unto them, Have ye *understood* all these things? they say unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then said He unto them, Therefore every scribe, instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." (Matt. xiii. 51, 52.) When our Lord was about to send out His disciples as His witnesses, it is said, "Then opened

he their understanding, that they might *understand* the Scriptures." (Luke xxiv. 45.) How often we read of Paul, when preaching to the Jews, reasoning with them out of the Scriptures. (Acts xviii. 24.) If the apostle addresses the Romans as able to admonish one another, it is because he can say of them, "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." (Rom. xv. 14.) Where the action of the Spirit in the assembly is most definitely treated of, as in 1 Cor. xii., it is not to the exclusion of *the word*. "For to one is given by the Spirit *the word* of wisdom, to another *the word* of knowledge by the same Spirit." (1 Cor. xii. 8.) Where the apostle enumerates the marks by which he and others approve themselves the ministers of God, we have mentioned in the wondrous catalogue, "by knowledge, by the word of truth, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." (2 Cor. xi.) If you look at what that armour consisted of, you will find truth as a girdle for the loins, and "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Eph. vi. 14-17.) The apostle speaks of what he had afore written to the Ephesians, "whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." (Eph. iii. 4.) Where the same apostle speaks of the admonishing one another, see what he mentions first as an essential pre-requisite. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col. iii. 16.) To Timothy he says, "If

thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained." He exhorts him, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine; meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all." "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." (1 Tim. iv. 6, 13, 15, 16.) In the second epistle Timothy is exhorted thus: "And the things thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (ii. 2.) As to himself we have these words: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (ver. 15.) Among other qualifications of the bishop, or overseer, as they are given in Titus i., we have this: "Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." From all this it is evident, my brethren, that it is not merely by little scraps of truth, brought out whenever some impulse to that end visits us, that the Church is to be edified.\* No, they by whom the Holy Ghost acts to feed and nourish and guide the saints of God, are they whose souls are exercised habitually in the word

\* God forbid that any should be discouraged from ministering the least word tending to real edification. But such as are used of the Lord thus would be the very last to suppose that theirs was the only ministry, or that by which the need of saints is principally supplied of God.

of God; they "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. v. 14.) As has been said, the least that can be expected of those who minister in the church is, such acquaintance with the word of God as this.

Knowledge of God's word, however, is not sufficient. There must be its present application to the consciences of the saints, so as to meet their present need. For this, as some one has in substance observed, there must be either acquaintance by intercourse, &c., with their state (and this could never be very perfect or accurate), or else direct guidance from God. This is true of those who are in the fullest sense, and most manifestly, the gifts of Christ to His Church, as evangelists, pastors or teachers. It is God only who can guide them to those portions of truth which will reach the conscience and meet the need of souls. It is He only who can enable them to present the truth in such a way as to secure these ends. God the Holy Ghost knows the need of each and all in the assembly; and He can guide those who speak to speak the suited, needed truth, whether they have the knowledge of the state of those addressed or not. How important, then, implicit and unfeigned subjection to Him.

One thing which would always mark ministry in the Spirit would be the promptings of personal affection for Christ. "Lovest thou me?" was the thrice repeated question to Peter, connected with the injunction, as oft repeated, to feed Christ's flock. "For the love of Christ constraineth us," Paul says. How different this from the many motives which might influence us naturally. How important that we should be able each



time we minister to say with a good conscience, "My motive for speaking was not a love of prominence, or the force of habit, or the restlessness which could not be content unless something were being done; but love to Christ and to His flock, for His sake who purchased it with His own blood." Surely it was this motive which was wanting in the wicked servant, who hid his Lord's talent in the earth.

Then, further, ministry in the Spirit, or indeed any action in the assembly to which He leads, would always be marked by a deep sense of responsibility to Christ. Let me put it to you, my brethren, and to my own soul as well. Suppose we were questioned at any time after the close of a meeting,—Why did you give out such a hymn, or read such a chapter, or offer such a prayer, or speak such a word? Could we with a clear, good conscience reply, "My only reason for doing so was the solemn conviction that it was my Master's will?" Could we say, "I gave out that hymn because I was fully persuaded that it was the mind of the Spirit, that at that juncture in the meeting it should be sung? I read that chapter, or spoke that word, because I felt clear before God that it was the service my Lord and Master assigned me? I offered that prayer, because I knew that the Spirit of God led me as the mouth of the assembly to ask those blessings which in it were implored." My brethren, could we answer thus, or is there not often the taking this part or that, without any such sense of responsibility to Christ? "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," says the apostle Peter. This does not mean, let him speak according to the Scriptures,

though this be of course true. It means, or rather says, that they who speak, are to speak *as oracles of God*. If I cannot say in speaking, "This is what I believe I have been taught of God, and what God has given me to speak at this time," I ought to be silent. Of course a man may be mistaken in saying this, and it is for the saints to judge, by the word of God, all that is spoken. But less ought not to induce any one to speak, or take any part in the meetings, than the solemn conviction before God, that God has given him somewhat to say or do. If our consciences were exercised to act under such responsibility as this, it would doubtless prevent a great deal which does take place; but at the same time it would make way for God to manifest His presence, as we are not wont to witness it.

How strikingly do we behold this sense of direct responsibility to Christ in the apostle Paul. "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel. For if I do this thing willingly," (that is, from choice, for any personal object,) "I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me." (1 Cor. ix. 16, 17.) How affecting his words to the same people! "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." (ii. 3.) What a rebuke to the lightness of heart, and self-sufficiency, with which, alas! we all too often handle God's sacred word. "For we are not as many," he says again, "which corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." (2 Cor. ii. 17.)

One other point I would touch upon. "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Tim. i. 7.) "The spirit of a sound mind." A man may have little or no human learning, he may be unable to express himself in any elegant diction, or even with grammatical propriety. All this he may lack, and yet be "a good minister of Jesus Christ." But the spirit of a sound mind he must have. And may I now, while on this topic, mention what in other places, as well as among ourselves, has sometimes made me very sad? I mean the confusion between the Persons in the Godhead, which is often made in prayer. When a brother has commenced by addressing God the Father, and has gone on to speak as though it were He that had died and risen again; or, addressing Jesus, has given thanks to Him for sending His only-begotten Son into the world, I confess to you I have said to myself, "Can it be the Spirit of God who leads to such prayers as these?" Surely all who conduct the worship of the saints need so much of the spirit of a "sound mind" as to avoid confusion like this. No one believes that the Father died on Calvary, or that Christ sent His Son into the world. Where, then, is the collectedness of spirit, the soundness of mind, which should characterize those who take the place of being the channels of the saints' worship, when they use language which really expresses what they do not themselves believe—and what it would be shocking for any one to believe!

Still reserving some other points for another letter,  
I am, yours affectionately in Christ Jesus,

## LETTER V.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS ON THE MUTUAL DEPENDENCE  
OF SAINTS, IN MEETINGS FOR MUTUAL EDIFICATION,  
AND ON OTHER SUBJECTS.

BELOVED BRETHEREN, my remarks in this will be of a more desultory character than in the preceding letters, my object being to gather up several points which could not be so well embraced in the subjects of my former communications.

And first, may I remind you, that whatever takes place in a meeting for mutual edification ought to be the fruit of communion. That is, if I read a chapter of the word, it is not that I have to look through my Bible to find a suitable chapter; but being more or less acquainted with the Word, the Spirit of God brings to my mind the portions He would have me read. So if a hymn is to be sung, it is not that I feel the time is come for singing, and so look through the hymn book for a nice hymn to sing. No; but out of the measure of acquaintance with the hymn-book that I have, the Spirit of God reminds me of a hymn, and leads me to give it out. The idea of half a dozen looking through their Bibles and hymn-books, to find chapters and hymns suitable to read or give out, is as subversive of the real character of a meeting for mutual edification, in dependence on the Holy Ghost, as can well be conceived. I may, indeed, have a

given chapter laid on my heart, and may need, from imperfect acquaintance with my Bible, to look for it; and so of a hymn; but this is clearly the only object one can rightly have, in turning over the pages of either when assembled on the ground of mutual dependence on the Holy Ghost for mutual edification.

Then, secondly, if this were well understood, it would follow, as a matter of course, that when any one was seen opening his Bible or his hymn-book, it would be known to be with the thought of reading a portion of the word, or giving out a hymn. The word, "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another," (1 Cor. xi. 33,) would then quite preclude the thought of anyone else taking part in the meeting, till the brother who had evinced his thought of doing so had either carried it into effect or laid it aside. This brings me fairly to the subject of mutual dependence, on which we may well and properly meditate for a little while.

The question as to the Corinthians, in 1 Cor. xi., was not as to ministry, but as to eating the Lord's Supper. The question of ministry comes on in chap. xiv. But the moral root of the disorder, in both cases, was the same. They failed to discern the Body of Christ, and so each was occupied with his own individual self. "For in eating, every one taketh before other his own supper." (verse 21.) The result was, "And one is hungry, and another is drunken." The principle of self was here permitted to produce fruits so glaring and so monstrous, as to shock one's natural sensibilities. But if I come to the meetings, and sit in the meetings, thinking only of the chapter I am to read, the hymn

I am to give out, the part I am to take, self is as entirely, in spiritual things, the hinge on which my thoughts and solitudes turn, as though, like the Corinthians in natural things, I having a supper, brought it and ate it, while my poor brother who could not afford this, went away without. It is in the fellowship of the one body of Christ quickened, actuated, taught, and governed by the One Spirit, that we meet together; and surely the thoughts of our hearts in thus assembling should neither be the supper I myself have to eat, or the part I myself have to take, but the wondrous bounty and grace of Him who has committed us to the keeping of the Holy Ghost, who will not fail, if humbly waited on, to assign each his proper place and part, without any restless anxiety in us to know what it is. In the body of Christ, each one is but a member; and surely if the Corinthians had discerned and realized this, the one who had a supper would have tarried for those who had none, to share it with them. In like manner, if my soul realizes this precious unity of the body, and my own humble place in it, as but one individual member of it, I shall not be in such haste to act in the assembly as to prevent others acting: and if I feel I have a word from the Lord, or a call from Him for some service, I shall still remember that others may have the same, and so leave room for them: and most of all, if I see another with his book open to read a portion or give out a hymn, I shall wait till he has done so, and not be in a hurry to get the opportunity before him. "Tarry ye one for another," will surely apply to this as well as to the breaking of bread. And in the 14th chapter we find

that when prophets were speaking in the meeting by immediate revelation, there was to be so much deference of one to another, that in the very act of speaking, if anything was revealed to another that sat by, the first was to "hold his peace." Besides, the general, moral bearing of such a word as "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (James i. 19), would teach us thus to tarry one for the other.

Then, thirdly, the object of our assembly is edification. This is the point pressed in 1 Cor. xiv. In the 12th chapter we have the body of Christ in subjection to Him as Lord, and the witness here of His Lordship, by virtue of the indwelling and inworking of the Holy Ghost, who divides to every man severally as He will; closing with the catalogue of gifts, apostles, prophets, &c., set of God in the Church in their several places of use, or service, for the whole. To covet earnestly the best gifts is enjoined, but a more excellent way referred to, namely, the charity, or love, of chapter xiii., without which the most splendid gifts are nothing, and which must regulate the exercise of all gifts, if edification is to be the result. This latter is the subject of chapter xiv. The gift of tongues was what seemed to man the most wonderful, and the Corinthians delighted in displaying it. Instead of love seeking the edification of all, it was vanity seeking to display its gifts. They were real gifts—gifts of the Spirit. And here, beloved brethren, is the solemn thing for us to weigh, that there may be the power of the Spirit for service, without the living guidance of the Spirit in its exercise. The latter there can only be where self is crucified, and Christ everything to the soul. The ob-

ject of the Holy Spirit is not to glorify the poor earthen vessel which contains his gifts; but by the humble, gracious, self-renouncing use of these gifts to glorify Christ from whom they flow; and this is accomplished in the edification of the whole body. How beautiful this self-renunciation in Paul. Possessed of every gift, with what singleness of heart he sought not to exhibit his gifts, but to exalt his Lord, and edify the saints. "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." How forcible from the pen of such an one, those words of the Holy Ghost, "Let all things be done unto edifying." "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may exceed to the edifying of the Church."

Then again, every servant, to be faithful, must act under his master's directions. Hence the importance of what was so much pressed in my last, that if I appear in the assembly of the saints, it must be on no lower ground than that of a full and solemn persuasion of my own soul before God, that it is my master's presence which will I should so act. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Rom. x 3.) The measure of what I do is to be the measure of the faith God has given me; and God will take care that His servants know thus what He would have them do. Nothing less than a firm and solemn conviction that



is His will, can be a warrant for my acting in the assembly, or indeed anywhere besides, as the servant of God. In the assembly, however, there is a divine check or guard on the abuse of this principle;—viz., the provision made in such a word as “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.” (1 Cor. xiv. 29.) It is for my own soul in the first place to judge, and know whether the Lord calls me to speak or to act in the assembly; but when I have so spoken or acted, it is for my brethren to judge, and in the vast majority of cases, it must be by their judgment that I abide. The case is a rare one indeed, in which I should be warranted in continuing to take a part in the meetings, if my doing so were disapproved by the brethren. It is quite evident, that if God has called me to speak or pray in the meetings,—if it be really from Him that my conviction of being led to do so proceeds,—it is as easy for Him to dispose and prepare the hearts of the saints to receive my ministry, and unite in my prayers, as it is to dispose my own heart for such service. If I am really led of the Spirit thus to act, the same Spirit who leads me and acts by me dwells in the saints; and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the Spirit in the saints will respond to ministry or worship in the Spirit on the part of any. Ordinarily, therefore, if I found saints burdened and troubled by my taking part in the meetings, instead of being edified thereby, I should be warranted in concluding that I had mistaken my place, and that I was not called thus to act. In the second place, suppose that what made the ministry of any one for a time unacceptable was to be found in the state of the

assembly, not his own state: suppose that he is so much more spiritual than the assembly, that they cannot enter into or appreciate what he ministers to them, what of such a case as this? It is not a very common one, and when it does arise, it may be for such a servant of Christ to enquire whether he has not to learn to be like his Master, and to teach and “to speak the word unto them, as they are able to hear;” whether he does not need a little more of Paul’s spirit, who could say, “we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children;” who says, too, in another place, “I have fed you with milk and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.” If, with such discriminating care and tenderness as this, his ministry is still not received, it must indeed be trying to the faith of such a servant of the Lord; but seeing that edification is the object of all ministry, and that saints cannot be edified by a ministry that does not commend itself to their consciences, there could be no good in forcing it upon the saints, whether they can receive it or not. The general weakness and disease of one’s body may produce the dislocation of some particular joint. The body, in such a case, will not be benefited by forcing the dislocated joint into action. It may be deplorable that it cannot act; but the only way for its use to be restored is to give it perfect rest for the time being, while the general health of the body is sought to be restored by other means. So in the case supposed,—continued ministry where it is not received, even if the cause be the low state of the assembly, only adds irritation to the generally bad condition of things, and

thus makes it worse. The servant of the Lord in such a case will find that to be silent is his wisdom, or it may be to him the intimation of his Master's will that he should serve elsewhere.

On the other hand, let me earnestly warn you, beloved brethren, against what, probably enough, Satan may now seek to make a snare to us, the spirit of criticism on what takes place in the meetings. His effort is always to urge us from one extreme to another; and if we have erred on the side of indifference, as though it made no matter what took place, if only the time was filled up, it is more than likely we shall now be in danger on the other side. The good Lord, in His mercy, keep us. Nothing can be more deplorable, as to the state of heart it indicates, and nothing can be a greater hindrance to blessing, than a captious, criticizing spirit. We assemble to worship God and edify one another, not to occupy ourselves in determining who ministers in the flesh, and who prays in the Spirit. Where the flesh does manifest itself, let it be judged. Sorrowful and humiliating work it is to discern and judge it, in place of our own proper, happy privilege of mutually enjoying the fulness of our blessed Saviour and Head. Do let us beware of a spirit of fault-finding. There are lesser gifts, as well as greater ones, and we know who it is that has bestowed more abundant honour on the parts that lacked. The actings of a brother in the assembly are not of necessity all fleshly, because he acts in the flesh to some extent. On this point, it would be well for us all to ponder the words of one most highly honoured amongst us,—“There is great need of this, namely,

that we attend first to the nature, and, secondly, to the measure of our gift. While on this last, *i.e.*, the measure of the gift, let me say that I do not 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 proportion of faith*. All beyond *that* is flesh, and putting himself forward and this is felt, and his whole gift rejected; and this because he has not known how to confine himself to it; and therefore his flesh acts, and his speaking is attributed to it—and no wonder. It is also true as to the nature of a gift; if a man sets himself to teach, instead of confining himself to exhorting (if he exhorts) he will not, and cannot, edify. I would especially desire the attention of every brother who ministers in the word to this remark, which, from lack of faithfulness in his hearers, may never reach him in any other way."

It is to brethren who minister that these words are addressed, but I quote them to you, beloved brethren, that we may learn not to condemn everything that any one says or does, because something of the flesh is discernible in it. Let us thankfully own what is of the Spirit, distinguishing it from all else even in the ministry or actings of the same individual.

There are still two or three points of minuter detail, on which, in the confidence of brotherly love, I would add a word or two. As to the distribution of the bread and wine at the Lord's table. It is, on the one hand, most desirable that this should not be uniformly and exclusively by one or two individuals, as though it were some clerical distinction; while, on the other

hand, I can see no warrant in Scripture for any one breaking the bread, or giving the cup, without giving thanks. In Matt. xxiv. 26, 27; Mark xiv. 22, 23; Luke xxii. 19; and 1 Cor. xi. 24, we are told that the Lord Jesus gave thanks when He broke the bread and took the cup; while in 1 Cor. x. 16, the cup is termed the cup of blessing or of thanksgiving. If, then, Scripture is to be our guide, how plain that any one who breaks the bread, or takes the cup, should at the same time give thanks; and if any of us do not feel power to do this, may we not rightly question whether we are called to distribute the bread and the wine?

Then as to rule or oversight in the Church, and indeed as to the qualifications to be looked for, in any who act in ostensible service amongst saints, 1 Tim. iii. and Titus i. ought to be prayerfully studied by all of us. There is one particular in 1 Tim. iii. 6, which it may be well to be reminded of. "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." It is possible for the call of God and the gift of Christ to be found with a young man like Timothy (or if we go back to the Old Testament, with a Jeremiah); and "let no man despise thy youth" would apply to any such in the present day, even as to Timothy of old. But it is to Timothy the words quoted "not a novice," &c., were addressed. His youthfulness was to be no encouragement to those to act, who had neither the gift nor the grace which had been bestowed on him. And there is even a natural fitness and beauty in the young taking the place of subjection instead of rule, which seems to me to be sadly overlooked sometimes. "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves

unto the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

(1 Peter v. 5.)

The Lord in His mercy, beloved brethren, grant us to walk humbly with Himself, and thus may no hindrance be presented to the working of His blessed Spirit amongst us.

Yours, in unfeigned affection,

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