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CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

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"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, [let us prophesy] according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, [let us wait] on [our] ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, [let him do it] with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. xii. 6-8).

I HAVE purposely taken a scripture in an epistle familiar to us all, where we have gifts brought into prominence which were not on one hand for mere signs to the world, nor on the other that character of foundation gift which was limited to the earliest days of the church of God upon the earth. At least no apostles are specially named among the gifts of our chapter. Thus it is evident that our list differs on both sides (whether looking at the world as the sphere of God's remarkable manifestations of power, or looking at the church as requiring what was special in order to its first establishment on the earth); and this because of a design here different from that of 1 Cor. xii. or of Eph. iv. We have what is called the ordinary ministry required for the good of the saints, rather than the manifestation of God's power in man by the Spirit in witness of the risen Lord, or of Christ's love

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to His body in its fulness, and in principle too till the completeness of His work on the earth. From the choice of such a scripture every one will see that my object is a practical one. It is to search simply and honestly, as in the sight of God, into the true nature of Christian ministry,—of ministry such as we need to know it and to have it freely exercised in our midst,—such as we ought to acknowledge, if we are to be found faithful as the children of God in presence of so great a blessing.

You will see therefore, that it is here assumed—as, I trust, unnecessary to be proved particularly now—that Christian ministry is a permanent institution. It is agreed that Christian ministry, not in all its forms, but in substance and in its essential nature as it was given from the beginning, was not intended to be withdrawn till the close of God's work here below as now known in Christianity. We are not going to enter into curious questions as to what preceded Christianity, nor to occupy ourselves with anything that is to follow after Christianity has accomplished its mighty task. For the present I hold myself, and would direct your attention, to that which is connected with our constant place of privilege and duty every day. As this will greatly simplify the subject, so at the same time it is quite evident that it concerns every Christian.

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. It may embrace, no doubt, different spheres, but it brings the word of



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God to bear upon souls, whether converted or unconverted. Confessedly, when we look at the converted, ministry has by no means the same simple character as the gospel addressed to the unconverted. If then Christian ministry in the word be divided into two great departments, namely, towards the world on the one hand, and towards the church or Christian body on the other, it is clear that, whereas towards the world it is really summed up in evangelizing or proclaiming the gospel of the grace of God towards men, towards the church it is a more varied and complex matter. Here we must leave room for distinctions of very great importance.

That these are the two greater departments of ministry in the word, few Christians will be disposed to question, or to require proofs at length. The thing is all but self-evident. Thus the word of God is perfectly plain as to evangelizing. Our Lord Jesus, before He left the world, directed His servants to preach the gospel to every creature. He told them to go and make disciples of all nations—the Gentiles, “baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” He bid them proclaim repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. He charged them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation. Is it not evident that this was ministry to those without, and that it has for its aim the making known the name of God, as now fully revealed in Christianity, and the glad news of redemption to every creature whom they could reach? Accordingly, among the most prominent of His servants, are seen the

apostles themselves. Peter preaches on the day of Pentecost to the thousands that gathered after the astonishing sign was shown of the sending down the Holy Ghost from heaven. This arrested universal attention : men flocked to know what this wonder was ; and the apostle Peter explained all from the Jewish Prophets and Psalms. But he did more. He preached the glad tidings. He showed them the way to be saved ; he set forth Jesus as the one and only possible means for a sinful man, and then of course, to men of Judea and of Israel. He was addressing such as had gathered at that time to the great feast of Pentecost—strangers from every nation under heaven, but still Jews ; to whom he set forth Jesus as the Messiah (above all His death and cross, resurrection and ascension) made Lord and Christ ; for all these and more are brought before us in one way or another, and are substantially the same great truth of His rejection by Israel and His exaltation by God, though it is quite admitted that the whole subject is testimony to Jesus and hence of far larger bearing than simply the way for a sinner to be brought to God.

In preaching we should avoid too nice distinctions. It is wise to be direct, simple, and thorough, in affectionately pressing with solemn earnestness the broad facts of Christ and redemption. It may be all well among the children of God to point out the various lights and shades in the truth of God ; but, in my judgment, refinement in evangelizing spoils the message of Divine grace. As God is simple in His dealing with souls, so should we be as servants, not seeking to please men or ourselves. The same apostle

Paul, who was inspired to lead into all the heights and depths of God's counsels and ways, when helping on the children of God, appears in the Acts of the Apostles, coming down to a gospel of such simplicity as many preachers would hardly think of giving out. He takes his stand on the facts of Christ, His death and resurrection; but he also takes care to meet them exactly where they were, where for instance he cites the rain from heaven and fruitful seasons as witnesses of God's goodness, against degrading and selfish demon-gods, even when all the nations were suffered to go their own ways. These suffice to tell of His beneficence who now sent them the glad tidings of Jesus. For we are not to suppose that we have all reported, but some special point urged in divine wisdom: the wants of a sinner's heart cannot be met by rain from heaven; nor can a soul now, still less in view of God and eternity, be satisfied by present goodness in this world, however rich. Nevertheless it is wholesome and important to note how the apostle takes up the poor heathen, and presents to them (from what was before their eyes, or in their own consciousness) testimony to a power infinitely superior to the creature. To a heathen, who had not the written word, the analogy of God's care for the body was no mean argument from which to proceed to tell the love of God to the soul, and thus the whole story of Divine grace. To my mind there is no less wisdom than simplicity in such a method, which we might do well to cultivate.

The same apostle Paul, speaking to the Jews, does not enter into the question of the outward creation, or the

nature of man here below, forgetful of his truest dignity (Acts xiv. xvii., end). He takes them up to the Old Testament (Acts xiii. xvii., beginning), shows them the Messiah, His death, resurrection, and kingdom, required by the positive word of God with which they were so familiar, and then compares the facts of the life and death of the Lord Jesus, as the only answer to what the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets prepare us for. All this clearly shows the singleness of purpose, and consequently the union of depth and plainness in the presentation found in scripture. For it is a mistake to suppose that those most profoundly taught are necessarily the hardest to understand. The reverse was true in the apostle's case.

When people are imperfectly instructed, they are apt to be in a cloud both of thought and words ; and often fancy that, because they are scarcely intelligible, they must be very deep. The truth is that, where there is the certainty of the known truth, you can afford to be simple ; and where there is adequate power to give out as the rule, so the hearers will find it. There will be real depth according to spiritual power and acquaintance with God. It is inconceivable, when one enters really into what God is, as revealed in the glorious person of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and His work and His position, that there will not come out what is of God above the thoughts of flesh and blood. Ordinarily however, the greater the intimacy with God, the more will there be simplicity with man ; and although simplicity can very well cohere with depth, we must remember that depth is a very different thing from obscurity.

Now the apostles were not muddy, but perspicuous and plain. Their manner was direct, personal, positive.

They had before their souls the most momentous truth from God for man, and this distinctly seen. They had the deepest conviction of man's ruin and of God's grace ; they had before their eyes in the fullest and the clearest light who Jesus is and what the Rejected of men did and suffered in atonement, and what God could, would, and did work, through Christ the Lord, for poor sinners. This formed the staple of their teaching. This is the gospel. This is the glad tidings of a Saviour, and more particularly of Him displayed in the mightiest work, the only one indeed, which could at all, which does fully, meet the sinner's wants, namely the work of redemption.

But this clears the way at once. There is first of all the ministry of the gospel, next there is the ministry of the church. But when we come to look at the ministry of the church, there are many different kinds of it. Take for instance what we have in the verses read. "Having, then, gifts differing," as it is said, "according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, [let us prophesy] according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, [let us engage] in ministry, or he that teacheth, in teaching ; or he that exhorteth, in exhortation. He that giveth, [let him do it] with simplicity (or, liberality); he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

Any thoughtful mind will see that this is not at all the way in which man would have written of Christian ministry. Is it too much to say that not a single individual in all the world would of himself have written as the apostle has done here ? If so, do you think that this was not meant to instruct us ? Is it not a notable

fact, while he introduces that which no one could dispute to be of the highest character of Christian ministry (for instance, prophesying), that at the same time he brings in exhortation; and again he mingles with this a kind of ministry which has nothing directly to do with public instruction in the word, while nevertheless, it is emphatically called "ministry;" and again he adds to them, yet distinct from all, ruling or taking the lead. Many Christians seem to be greatly afraid of ruling. They are jealous lest its admission might compromise what they consider the scriptural principles of Christians. They would do better to sink every principle which cannot face the word of God. They would do better simply and fully to trust what God has given and revealed. Be assured that the Lord knows how to keep up principles for us far better than we for Him. He classes ruling along with the other forms of ministry. This should be enough for the believer. It is in no way bound up with an authority which does not exist any longer.

But there is another matter to which I call your attention. Giving is a kind of ministry that is often deficient, not receiving, but giving. Again, it is another gift to show mercy. They are both admirable kinds of ministry. At the same time they are not assuredly the forms of ministry that men would have joined with prophesying and ruling: nobody would have thought of such an association. What are we then to infer from all? This at least, I think, that God is much larger, simpler, more real, than we are—that He counts as a part of the wondrous work that He is carrying on in the church a great many services that we

do not call ministry and have not in general regarded as any gifts at all. Ought we not then to be guided in these things by God's word?

This brings me to an important principle that I desire to press and always hold fast as well as to urge on others; that ministry is not any mere qualification which we have naturally—that no ability that any man can have is what constitutes the force of ministry. Ministry always depends on a positive gift from the Lord. Do I mean then, by this, to set aside natural abilities or acquired qualifications, more particularly since we have been Christians? In no wise. It is an equal error to confound gift with qualification, and to deny that qualification is of any consequence to gift. Let us believe both, but maintain, according to the word of God, that gift is entirely in itself distinct from those qualities which nevertheless may be necessary for the due working of the gift. The Lord has Himself set this forth in a remarkable parable (Matthew xxv. 14-30), which may be referred to for a moment, because the matter is put with such decision that it is hard to see how any one can fairly evade its force. We learn thence that Christ was as a man travelling in a far country who called his own servants and delivered to them his goods. It is not merely God in His condescension making use of *our* goods, which is also quite true. He knows well that the Lord does so. But this is not the point of the parable. The Lord delivered to these servants *His* goods. This was when He went up to heaven. For His country, according to the style of Matthew's Gospel, is the land of Israel. He is regarded as Jehovah-Messiah from chapter i. Palestine therefore was His land. Accordingly

heaven, in the point of view of this Gospel, is the far country. Going away, then, He delivered them His goods, "and unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one,—to every man according to his several ability." Two things are here evidently distinct. The ability of the servants is recognised in its place, but the goods of Christ are still more manifest on the other side. In short the Lord does not give the same kind of gift to different servants. Who ever yet saw two men that had the same? Far from fighting with these differences, it seems to me in beautiful harmony with Christianity, and has immense practical importance. Every servant of the Lord has a gift suitable to his own ability; and hence, as the ability of servants differs, so also does the gift. Thus, even though for instance the Lord might give the gift of evangelizing to many, as He does, they do not receive it in the same form or measure. Every evangelist has his own line of work, according to his peculiar gift, in presenting the truth. Is this a matter to find fault with? Much rather should we thank God for it. Miserable is the ministry of one man following another. I grant you it is the constant tendency of narrow minds. They have got an ideal before them, such as it is—good, bad, or indifferent—some favourite of theirs by whom each is judged, and to whom they would like every one else to be conformed. Their norm for the church and for those who minister would be to resemble a regiment of soldiers, of the same height, or as nearly the same as possible, and with the self-same dress and drill. But this is sadly discordant from the will of the Lord, who gives in no case the same gift in mode or degree, but

to each as He will. The right working of Christ's ministry depends on this—"Having then gifts *differing*," followed by its different forms. And this is so true, that, even though the gifts may be to the same end, yet take any one of them—evangelists, pastors, teachers,—and it will be found that they have each their own individuality as servants of the Lord. They have each their own ability, to which grace adapts the gift of the Lord Jesus ; for His gift is evidently suitable to the particular vessel in which it is placed. This serves a weighty purpose of God in the church, on which I may touch a little more when we come to see how it has been abused and perverted. For thus man always tends, under every possible circumstance, to trench upon, and hinder, and spoil the blessed work the Spirit of God would carry on for the glory of Christ. Let it suffice to point out the broad principle at the present.

It has been shown, then, that gift is not to be confounded with ability ; that ability is not to be denied because of gift ; that the two things are perfectly consistent ; and that our Lord Himself is the authority for both. Our Lord intimates that He gives His goods according to the several abilities of the servants. We shall find there is more than this, important guard as it is against both unbelief and fanaticism ; but we must reserve each for its own place.

This, then, is the first element I desire to press as to ministry in the word, that there are "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." It is not therefore according to the education of the man, or the will of others. Popes and patrons, prelates and congregations, have no voice in scripture as to ministry

in the word. Its title is directly and immediately derived from One immeasurably above them all. As to the source of the gift, everything depends upon the Giver. This is of immense moment. The gift comes from Christ—from Christ alone—not from the church in part, any more than wholly. Nor should the church presume to sanction formally what comes from the Lord Christ, as if He needed her countersign.

But further, this principle decides its place in another way ; for, properly speaking, Christian ministry began with Christ's ascending up to heaven. He designated apostles while He was upon the earth ; He sent out seventy persons with a last message to Israel ; but the same New Testament which tells us these facts declares that, when He ascended up on high, He gave gifts. Both facts are true ; they are not to be arrayed one against another, which is what infidelity does, though sometimes well-meaning ignorance does so too. But if we do not know, we should seek to learn ; for ignorance in divine things often exposes souls to the assaults and influence of infidelity. Though far from being the same thing, we should bear in mind that ignorance of the mind of God does expose to the inroads of the enemy, who takes advantage of it.

However this may be, we see what a place Christian ministry has. It began when Christ had done with the earth, consequent on the accomplishment of redemption. He had come down to the earth, but it was to test man. A man, He lived among men here below, manifesting the Father in the midst of darkness ; but it too surely proved that man would not have Him—yea, hated both Him and the Father. The end of that

was the cross. Risen from the dead, He acts in power—not merely in testimony, but efficaciously; and this too, not only in power over the body, but in full delivering energy, first for the soul, by and by for the body, conforming it to Himself in the glory of resurrection. Meanwhile, exalted above, He works by the Spirit of God sent down to maintain His glory and give effect to His grace. In the practical working out of this He gives gifts as He will, and these constitute the ground of true Christian ministry. When He rose from the dead, He commenced a new thing; as it is said—"Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." At the right hand of God He inaugurates an entirely new work, and in connection with this work He provides a fresh and suited instrumentality. The operation of this instrumentality is Christian ministry.

The first part of this service of the Lord is His dealing with men by the word, gaining their attention, and drawing them out of the world to God, through His name; but then, when souls are converted, by much the greater part of Christian work remains to be done. They are quickened indeed, but only brought within the threshold of divine blessing. It is not that one doubts or slight the reality of this blessing. God forbid that we should disparage the new birth! They have Christ as their life; but how much they have to learn of Him whom they now possess! Hence the main work of Christian ministry in the church is to lead those converted into a deepening practical acquaintance with Christ and delight in Him and His glory, into the application of the truth (found only in its fulness in Him) to all the difficulties as well as to

all duties and the energetic purposes of His love, while we are passing through this world. Hence the need of various forms for the due fulfilment of Christian ministry; as we see in the passage read.

The apostle begins with prophecy. It is indeed the highest character of instruction from God. It is not necessarily predictive. Prophets do predict, but this is not what constitutes prophecy. On the other hand, it is a great mistake to suppose that prophesying is merely edifying men in a general way. Prophesying does edify men in the most important way; but the verse to which I have referred in chap. xiv. of the 1st Corinthians is not a definition of prophesying but a description; that is, it does not tell us what prophesying is, and nothing else; but it describes what prophesying is as compared and contrasted with speaking in a tongue. To speak in a tongue does not edify people, but prophesying does. Yet there are many who might edify without prophesying. He surely edifies who strengthens souls by holding up Christ and making His love better known; and so does he who exhorts or teaches well. But none of these things is prophesying, which means that character of truth which puts the conscience of a man in the presence of God, which gives the soul the certainty that His mind is in that which is uttered, stripping and laying bare thoughts, motives, feelings, everything. Such is prophecy. There may be what approaches it, no doubt, elsewhere; but this is its proper force. In that same chapter (1 Cor. xiv.) we see the proof. Going into a Christian assembly, where they were talking with tongues, a stranger might think they were mad. What a reproof to the Corinthians! In

very childish spirit they were reasoning after some such human way as this: "If God has given us tongues, we ought to use them: but there is no place so important as the Christian assembly; therefore tongues should be used in the Christian assembly." One thought of Christ, one right feeling about the church, would have preserved them from that mistake. How did the talking with tongues promote the glory of the Lord Christ in the assembly? How did it edify those that came together in the name of the Lord? Not in the smallest degree: consequently, had there been singleness of eye in thinking of Christ and those that were Christ's, they never would have thought of it. They went astray owing to the commonest source of error: they were thinking of themselves and of their own importance. Having the gift of tongues, they thought they were to use them because they wished it. Who could forbid them? Did not the gift come from God? Thus, we see, it was independence of action, not perhaps without human arguments as to their duty, but without the express word of God, or even that instinctive sense of truth which requires a certain spirituality to apply aright. They were walking like men, and even children; they were carnal, not spiritual; they were reasoning instead of believing. All was wrong.

This led the apostle to suppose another case. Let a person come to the assembly, and hear them, not talking in a tongue that nobody could understand, but prophesying; and what a different result! Then all the secrets of the heart would be revealed, and the effect upon the unlearned person, or even the un-

believer, would be, that he would fall down on his face and feel that God was in them of a truth. In this case his conscience would have met God through the word thus brought to bear on him.

We must remember that in those days the Christians were surrounded by the heathen and the Jew; the one brought up in the follies of many gods and many lords, even below the consciences of man, instead of above them; the other accustomed to the driest and coldest possible moralizing on the law and the prophets. What a change it was for them to see the true God brought into contact with the heart of man and his conscience! The effect was immense on them, more particularly on the poor Gentile. Accordingly such an one fairly broke down prostrate before the living and true God who thus dealt with the secrets of his heart. But this shows us the true nature of prophesying. It was not predicting something that would have to be waited for, to see whether it would come to pass: this is not the prophesying the apostle means. Prophesying applies to the future in peculiar circumstances. Not that one looks for such a character of it now: I do not believe that a person predicting things now would be in the order of the action of the Holy Spirit, for the simple reason, that the predictions of importance for God and for man are already given in the written word. But there remains the other sense of it,—namely, the bringing out the truth of God so as to deal with man's conscience, and give him the full conviction that it is God who is speaking to him by man. I see no reason to doubt that God still vouchsafes this—in feeble measure perhaps, and in rare

cases ; but still, that the principle of it is true I cannot doubt, and that it will not fail as long as God has work and testimony on the earth.

But next we find what is called here “ministry;” and by ministry I apprehend is meant serving the saints—kindly, loving, self-denying interest in their difficulties, snares, sorrows, wants, and trials. It is not preaching nor teaching, but helping the saints otherwise. This is set down as a real gift. Do you not feel and know that there are those who teach admirably, to whom you would not think of going if in any strait ? I am sure there are not a few who can preach and teach too, yet do not possess that kind of spiritual power needed to advise in case of any trouble or difficulty. It is part of the fallen state of the church to concentrate all in one ; as on the other hand there is no disrespect if one simply own each according to what is given from above. Scripture alone gives the certain truth, and sanctions the right man for the right place.

Is it asked how the reality of these gifts can be known ? May there not be mistakes through vanity on the side of some claiming beyond their measure, or through the pride of those who disown and thwart what eclipses their self-importance ? I answer that all that is good in divine things is by the Holy Spirit, by whom God decides for us these difficulties. Undoubtedly prejudices may hinder for a time ; but those who know God can trust Him to make known how He would have us serve the Lord, or to whom we should look for loving succour in things too hard for us. Power of the Spirit in any way proves itself; especially where souls are habituated to test all by the word of God, as the

Christian and church always should. Were there no such person as the Holy Ghost in the Christian and in the assembly, the difficulty would be insuperable; and the objection has weight in exact proportion to the objector's unbelief in the real presence and gracious guidance of the Spirit, alas! the characteristic sin of Christendom. But the Spirit is here to care for the saints of God, to draw them out in worship and to direct them in service. Does He fail in this? Never where faith is at work. That unbelief cannot see how these things can be, is but natural. It is His function to glorify the Lord in all, but especially as regards public testimony by those to whom He has given special gifts for the general good.

Gift, then, of whatever kind it may be, is not an official status, nor a name by courtesy, but a real power which Christ gives by the Spirit, and which is made good in practice, as conscience guided by the written word will own; and this is just as true in "the ministry" or service of the saints, as in prophesying or any thing else. The chief difference is, that "ministry" in this sense may not be a public gift at all, whereas prophesying in the case of man is, of course. Those engaged in preaching and teaching may also have this gift of "ministry." I am persuaded some have it in a very eminent manner; but it is well always to give the fullest breadth to gift, and to give the utmost value to what one does not possess oneself. Grace delights in honouring others. And, be assured, this the Lord would have us cultivate somewhat more. It is always happy when those who themselves preach or teach are earnest in maintaining the place and value of those

who do not, and when those who have other gifts, such as serving or ruling, stand up for those who teach or preach. "For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body."

It is in this way that God works for welding all together by His Spirit. His is no system of classes, each jealous of another. All that was found abundantly in heathenism, if not in Judaism; but it is not so in Christianity. There are "gifts differing," and each servant of Christ should maintain those of others, trusting the Lord as to his own; for there can be no course less worthy than for a Christian minister to be contending for himself under the plea of Christ's honour. For sometimes excellent men fail in this, through a mistaken notion of not allowing the Lord's gift to be despised.

This is all well; but am I the right one to see to it in my own case? or should I strive to stir up others on my behalf?

It is clear that there is always plenty of evil going on; but as a rule, true wisdom, if you are ill-used, is quietly to bow, and, if you must, to fight the Lord's battles, confiding in Him to espouse your cause, but in no case to fight your own battles. You may have

done so ; perhaps we have all done so ; but have we not learnt, if so, that the route is cheerless, and that not thus can we gain the victory that shines to the praise of Jesus in His day ? Your defence provokes aggression, and, as long as you defend yourself, you will have, not one only, but many, who will for this reason suspect and oppose you.

Such is human nature, and the children of God are not free from its effects. The path of faith gives deliverance from these difficulties, though it has its own, in which the Lord shows the sufficiency of His grace. Therefore leave these matters with Him. Our business is to fight His battles, not our own—to look at the things of others, which are really of Jesus Christ, and not our own.

Hence we return to the great theme now before us. "Having, then, gifts differing" does not mean valuing our own gifts, or of those who accept particular views on given points of an external character—the surest sign of a party spirit. In the church of God, in order to faith's full blessing, the Lord gives gifts various in measure, and differing in kind and aim. Hence the plain duty of all the saints, and more particularly of His servants, is to take care that there is nothing on their part, and nothing sanctioned by the saints in this or that servant, that would hinder the free and full operation of whatever the Lord has given for the church's good ; for if He gives, it is ours to receive, and, as we value His love and authority, to receive all in their place, as He has set each in the assembly. This is the ground of ministry, and the true principle on which depends its due working to His glory.

But every reflecting Christian will observe how this clears the way immensely. The church of God is neither the source nor the channel of ministry. Without speaking of the monstrous sin of accepting the world's interference, or accrediting a mere sect, which of course, like the world, can only give an authority within its own circumscribed limits (for sects, like nations, are mutually jealous, and only recognise each other by courtesy), the right of the Lord—the free action of His service in grace throughout the entire assembly of God—is ignored by both, and as impossible to be heeded in sects as in the world.

But supposing you look now at the brightest and fairest scene that God ever made on this earth—namely, His own church, the body of Christ—it is most certain that ministry never did find its source or authorization in the church, but from the Lord Jesus acting by the Spirit; and this can be readily proved by the word of God. It is a truth indeed of capital importance, yet little seen and less acted on, but indispensable to every saint, and above all to every one who serves the Lord in the word.

First of all, then, it is clear, according to the scripture already referred to (Eph. iv.), that ministerial gift is attributed to Christ as the Giver. If it be said that Christ is away, I answer, that this was true when Christian ministry began. There is no essential change in this; for although, before proper Christianity was seen among men, the Lord had chosen apostles and others, like the seventy messengers sent throughout Israel, we must remember that they had an exclusively Jewish mission before He (Christ) went to

heaven. They were Messianic envoys, who testified of the kingdom only, not of redemption by His blood, still less of Christian standing or the assembly of God ; and their testimony was armed with peculiar powers, revoked before He suffered (Luke xxii. 36).

But my subject to-night is not Jewish but Christian ministry, which followed on Jesus taking His place on high, as Lord of all and Head of the church. Ascended on high, He gave gifts unto men. Those first named are no doubt the most important : He gave some apostles. So great is the change, that previous appointment is quite passed by ; even the apostles are set on new and heavenly ground. But He gave some prophets also, either distinct from apostles as here, or associated with them in the foundation of the new building, when the same term was met with. Then we hear of some He gave as evangelists ; that is, individuals specially fitted to spread the glad tidings to every creature. Lastly, He gave some pastors and teachers ; that is, such servants of His as were qualified privately as well as publicly to enforce the truth of God, both doctrinal and practical, on His children. The object of all this was "for the perfecting of the saints," with a new ministerial work, with a view to edifying the body of Christ. Thus the proper effect, and the shape taken, are clearly laid down.

This then is plain, and at the same time of weighty consequence ; because we have certainty from the word of God as to the Giver, and the most important kinds of ministry ; but, besides that, as to its aim and object. May we not add too, from the context, the implied perpetuity of Christian ministry, peculiarly expressed

so as not to clash with the constant expectancy of Christ, but enough to comfort faith; for if Christ has given in each case "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," it cannot be suspended—still less terminable and fail—till the whole end is accomplished. Assuredly the Lord dies no more. He died once, and for us, blessed be His name; but this was before He ascended and became Head of the church. He is living at the right hand of God, and, as the unfailing Source of supply, He gives these gifts.

This again is another exceedingly important consideration. To faith it supplies the answer, whatever the questions that arise. Let us conceive the present company to be a true, however faint, representative of the church on earth; and the question to be started by any, How ministry is to be appointed in our midst, and how what is real is to be distinguished from pretension.

Must we not look to the Lord, and search His word? To form our own thoughts and theories is natural, but human, and the way of sure error. Does the Lord leave us without instruction? Certainly not. He who gives the gift (which, when exercised, constitutes Christian ministry), secretly deals with the souls of the saints whom He would build up with His grace and truth, and of the servant who is in a given way stirred up and strengthened of the Holy Ghost to go forth in the work, whatever it may be, to which he is called. How often and how various the exercises and conflicts between heart and conscience; love for the Lord and for souls; fear of one's own nature and perhaps of others!

I remember myself, for instance, a person in whom the beginning of his work in the ministry of the word among the saints was of this sort. Found just in such a company as is here this night, he had strongly enough the word of God laid on his spirit. He was timid ; he did not wish to speak ; he dreaded a mistake about the Lord's will in rising, but he did not like to risk the appearance of forwardness. Was there not pride in this ? He really shrank from what people might say, and consequently kept back. There is sometimes as much of self in cleaving to one's seat, as in too great eagerness to leave it. There may be flesh in both ways—the vanity of coming forward, and the pride that shrinks from being thought vain. Both are wrong. Were there more simple occupation with the Lord, and hearty exercise of love in seeking the good of souls, most of these difficulties would disappear. However he had not the faith to go forward. The meeting proceeded. The very scripture so heavily pressing on his heart was read by another. Then he felt constrained to rise, and ventured to speak out boldly the word of God, who was pleased to carry home the message to the hearts and consciences of the children of God then present. This was used to teach him to confide in the Lord, and with quietness and simplicity to go on in the face of difficulty, opposition, detraction, hindrance—everything which the enemy excites wherever there is a gift from Christ exercised in dependence on Him ; for assuredly he will never leave undisturbed those who are really raised up of God. He may not harass thus where natural or worldly plans reign, but he knows how to sift, thwart, and trouble where Christ is

sought to be served. Thus the fact of such opposition and difficulties ought rather to reassure and cast on the Lord where there is faith to look to Him and His word.

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. Not that it is right or gracious to be hard on any man in such circumstances. Indeed it always strikes one as deplorable to hear of the readiness of some to bear hard on the comparatively young and the ardent, still more on older men who have been under less favourable conditions for knowledge and free service. It seems to me an altogether mistaken line of criticism to be sharp on worthy labourers who could know little, and at the same time to be timid enough in presence of mistakes in those who ought to know more and better. Where persons have somewhat of experience, they might be expected to have patience ; and where thoroughly grounded in the scripture, they can afford to hear all the difficulties and bear that which would be severe and crushing to young men. It is beneath the dignity of those matured in the mind of God, to be oversensitive with such as are apt to have their stumbling-blocks, prejudices, and objections. Bear in mind as to

this the language of the great apostle. The first sign of an apostle Paul puts forward is “in all patience.” If that was a goodly index of one extraordinarily sent by Christ, I am sure for other reasons it ought to be the accompaniment of a true minister everywhere. The more you have the consciousness of the Lord putting you forward, and being with you in the work, no matter what may be the form of your ministry, the more be encouraged to bear with the froward, to compassionate the ignorant, to help all that need it. The more you are assured of the truth and of the Spirit’s power, the more you can put up with that which would be otherwise trying. This is plain, that, if not simple in faith and strong in the Lord, you will in the same ratio be touchy, which is anything but a badge of Christ’s service. It is well to bear this in mind, for things are sadly changed in this as elsewhere. The church of God is not a place for avoiding difficulties, or displaying what we know and would make known. Ministry in the church, whatever is of God, whatever is holy, true, and good, must be fully tried, so as to put men to the proof. To faith this is just one of the privileges which the Lord turns to His own glory and the very great blessing of those who cleave to His name.

But this at once shows us that the idea of being what is called “educated for the ministry,” or taking it up because one happens to be a fluent speaker, is vain. I do not mean to say that as a question of ability this may not have its value in its own sphere. It is admitted that, if ability is not forgotten by our Lord, His gift is required in order to real ministry. So true is this, that we may easily see, not only men in the world, but

Christians in the church, possessed of considerable ability but having no gift whatever in the word. You may all have known such, as I have; persons of admirable knowledge of scripture but without spiritual power to enforce or explain the word of God in a proper manner to others; if they attempted it, they would fall into confusion and make mistakes, or at best the word would be powerless for good. Even if what they said were pellucid as water and free from error, there would be no power in it,—nothing to bring Christ before the heart, or to exercise the conscience before God. It is evident that such speaking is not ministry. It may be a pleasing discourse, but not Christ applied to souls. Ministry means far more than a Christian speaking truly on scripture; it is the exercise of a positive gift from Christ; and what He gives has for its effect, either to bring souls to God out of the world, when they pass from death unto life, or to nourish and direct the life which is already given.

This leads also to another thing. It may be asked, Do we not find in the church of God, according to the account scripture gives of it, that there was a certain form or method of initiation—a public induction of gifted men—into the ministry? There are certainly many men of godly feeling who think much of what is called “ordination,” appeal confidently to Scripture for it, and think it is a very serious wrong or defect where it seems slighted or at least absent. Many where they least expect it can appreciate their difficulty. Some of us here can remember the time when we had equally strong prejudices on this head. Confessedly it is a duty to examine scripture thoroughly, and to cleave to it at

all cost. It is allowed also that the word of God is quite plain about it.

First of all, as to preaching the gospel, none can dispute that, when persecution broke up the church in Jerusalem, all good Christian men went about evangelizing the world (Acts viii.). This ought to settle the question as to principle. It is not only that they scattered and went everywhere, but that scripture proves they were sanctioned and blessed—that the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. It is in vain to allege in the face of Acts xi. 19–21 that the action then was irregular and owing to peculiar circumstances. It might have been hoped that those who plead for antiquity and order would show more respect for that which had the sanction of the primitive church, of one not behind the chief of the apostles, yea of God. For let it be remembered that all this was in the earliest days of holy order, if ever there were such, and of power in the Spirit, if ever this was known in man here below. These were days when truth was proclaimed by holy apostles and prophets; what can be more harsh than to imply a departure from due order sanctioned of the Lord at such a time? The truth is, that the objection is human, and that the collision of scriptural precedent is with an order set up, not by apostles, but by the fathers in the dark days of declension which too soon set in, when through the craft of the enemy another sort of order undermined that of the Holy Spirit, when pretentious form was substituted for power, when Ignatius, and Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria supplanted the apostles, and

utter departure from the grace and truth of Christ ensued far and wide.

But it is only fair to weigh those scriptures which are commonly quoted against freedom of preaching and teaching, always bearing in mind that the question is exclusively one, not of spiritual competency, but of liberty to minister among those assumed to be competent.

One of the passages chiefly insisted on is the beginning of Acts xiii. There it is alleged that even Saul of Tarsus, the apostle of the Gentiles, himself submitted to the rite of ordination. He and Barnabas, it is said, were then ordained at Antioch. Were there any real ground for this, the case would be closed. But the passage disproves that for which men produce it. There was no ordination whatever. Look at it well : the truth has nothing to fear. If it were the revealed will of the Lord for every preacher or teacher to be ordained, the right course would be clear ; for one must expect His gracious wisdom would make due provision for giving effect to His will among those who fear and love His name and word. Were the common practice of Christendom sound, it is certainly an easy matter anywhere to get ordained. It nowhere requires learning, and a little piety suffices the very few bodies which require it. Few trades or professions need so short an apprenticeship, so little ability, such slender acquirements ; and the mass of clergy, from Rome to Geneva, from Canterbury to the Primitive Methodist Conference, consist of men springing from a comparatively humble position in life. Ordination therefore, if scripturally requisite for all preachers and teachers, is by no means of difficult attainment in itself or in its conditions. The natural heart

likes it ; for it prevails among Catholics and Protestants ; and Mormons or Moravians as rigidly insist on it as Papists or Presbyterians. Quakers make much of their elders, and Congregationalists of their ministers. In short, search Christendom through, and all have in some shape their ordination, and hence their clergy, of which they think no small things. The question is —Is it of God ? How far Acts xiii. sanctions it, we shall see when the account is examined.

“ Now there were at Antioch in the church that was [there] prophets and teachers ; both * Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

Is this what men think to be ordination ? What are the facts, as compared with the inspired history ? Barnabas had been ministering in the word for years before this. So had Saul of Tarsus, as we learn from his own account in Gal. i. Compare Acts ix. 20–29. Afterwards for a year together Barnabas and Saul were gathered together in the church at this same city of Antioch, where they taught much people. Thus, not only Barnabas, but he who was an apostle by the call of the Lord Jesus, preached freely among Gentiles as well as Jews, and taught particularly in that assembly

* The best authorities omit *twoes* “certain” ; and there is no authority whatever for the insertion of “as” in the Authorised Version. Thus the vague impression is removed, that there were other teachers there unnamed. There were really three besides Barnabas and Saul.

and city where, a considerable time after, we are told (but not by God) that they received orders at the hands of their ecclesiastical inferiors. Is this even reasonable?

But this leads us to another point of importance. We have Paul's own inspired answer to the argument. He distinctly pronounces upon the question ; for from the first there were not wanting those that found fault with him because he had not been appointed by men,—that is, ordained. As to the twelve apostles, every one knew that the Lord Jesus had either formally or virtually appointed them (formally as to the eleven, virtually as to the twelfth); but there were men of that day who shook their heads as to Saul of Tarsus. Of course he said he was an apostle by divine call, and spoke of the wonderful vision that he had seen outside Damascus ; yet nobody saw it but himself, they sagely remarked, and who then could be absolutely sure ? Very mysterious man, this Saul, who had suddenly leaped from a persecutor to be an apostle. His teaching too was strikingly different from every one's else, even the other apostles'. Thus doubters appeared among the early Christians, who were stumbled at his immediate call, irrespective of those before him ; and these men were difficult to convince about the matter. Hence in an inspired epistle, and this the most solemn in its form that he ever wrote, Paul told the Galatians that he was an apostle not of men neither by man. He denied that humanity was either its source or its channel. This statement destroys the argument from top to bottom. Ordination, in the common popular sense, must mean that the channel, if not the source, of the ministry in question is human. The apostle for

himself denies it as to both. He insists in precise terms, that he was an apostle “not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.” That is, when God stopped him on the road to Damascus, when the Lord Jesus appeared and told him then that he was a chosen vessel, he was appointed or constituted His apostle from that day. This is what he lets us know, and exactly what he acted on. In the same epistle he says, “When it pleased him who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen.” What did he do then? Go up to Jerusalem to get his orders from the apostles? Not at all. “Immediately,” says he, “I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem.”

But was it then to be ordained? No; but to visit Cephas, with whom he stayed fifteen days. “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.” And so strongly does he feel on this head that he adds, “now, the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.” He was conscious that, for him and others too, the truth he preached was bound up with his ministry; and as the truth he taught was the development of what the grace of God gives, not only in the death and resurrection, but characteristically the exaltation of Christ in heaven, so his ministry had a heavenly source, not earthly, still less human. Expressly to harmonize with the divine

counsels as to Christ and the church, the ministry of the apostle Paul knew no human channel, and not even as its source Christ Himself on earth—for this also it is of importance to affirm. There are many pious souls who acknowledge God as the source of ministry ; but then, as they say, for the sake of order man must be its channel. The apostle takes pains to deny the latter no less firmly than the former.

Further this is not to be regarded as an unfruitful exceptional circumstance. It intimates a principle thenceforward to be seen at work in the service of the ascended Christ the Lord. It is vain to say that it does not concern others ; for he was an apostle, and had a miraculous vision. And why then did you venture to argue on his alleged ordination (Acts xiii.) ? If you take the ground of treating the apostle Paul as furnishing no instruction for ministry now, why do you throw dust into people's eyes by the insinuation that there was real ordination in his entrance on ministry. The truth is, that you are as wrong in your alleged facts as in denying their bearing on our practice. Saul and Barnabas had been preaching to those without, and they had also been instructing those within, before this pretended ordination, the fact and principle of which is excluded by Galatians i. 1., as far as Paul is concerned, in every shape, degree, or aim. Has the erroneous use, has the truth, no voice for us all ?

Do you ask, “Why then were Barnabas and Saul separated?” It was of the Spirit who was now distinctly sending them on an unprecedented errand among the Gentiles, though regularly even then “to the Jew first.” In this it was important to have the

sympathy and prayers of their fellow-labourers. Supposing some one here were marked out in some way adequate, as God knows how to make it to our consciences, to an untrodden field surrounded by peculiar difficulties, such as Tartary or the interior of China, with the danger of ever-present death for the truth's sake, —would it not be a becoming thing, in those circumstances, that those who had faith in God and fellowship with the work should get together, and with prayer and fasting lay their hands on the head of him that was going out, not pretending to make him anything that he was not before, but rather identifying themselves with this errand of love? The known and ancient sign of identification was the laying on of hands. It was so in the case of sacrifices; so too in conferring a blessing on a child, or a gift on one designated for it like Timothy (1 Tim. iv. 14; 2 Tim. i. 6), in praying for a sick person, or in appointing any to a charge like the seven curators of the poor in Acts vi., where the task was exclusively external, though some had also a spiritual gift in the word. It was always on the part of some one presumed to be connected with the source of the blessing, who by that outward sign indicated his desire that God would impart it to him who was its object.

Observe that elders are never said to have had hands laid on them, though it is probable from 1 Tim. v. 22, and from general use, that imposition of hands may have accompanied the choice of them by apostles and apostolic delegates. But scripture seems purposely silent, as if to warn against making a form of it, *there* at any rate it can claim no sure inspired warrant.

The case of Acts xiii., then, could not be one of ordi-

nation; for what is the meaning of this rite? In the generally understood sense among godly men (for I do not speak of vulgar superstition among Romanists or the like) it is this: the Christian may have the power from God (or the gift) for a certain work of a ministerial sort; but he has not thereby title to act, till those who have the authority from the church ordain him, investing him with a proper ministerial character according to the prescribed degree or position he is to occupy. There are differences; but this is the broad notion, divested of abuses and irregularities which abound here as elsewhere.

What a strange disorder, yea, inversion of things, to interpret the scripture so as to involve the conclusion that Paul and Barnabas, two apostles, got their orders from Christians, who were not only not apostles, but in gift, position, and every other respect, inferior to themselves! Is it thus they would prove a valid ordination? Who will pretend to say that, if ordination was meant, any could be thus chosen in a legitimate manner? Even in the world superior officers of government are never appointed by the inferior, unless in a republic. Government ordinarily and properly descends from the higher authority to the lower. Such is the picture according to the word of God; and it always will be so unless where and as the spirit of revolution upsets it. But such is the order most certainly in divine things. Accordingly, wherever in scripture the question of ordination comes up, a subordinate office is conferred by functionaries of higher grade. Where were such here? The advocates of ordination are in danger of repeating the error of Paul's adversaries, in denying his full apostolic authority,

through deriving it from men, and men of subordinate place. Scripture assigns to Paul an apostleship of the highest character and immediately from the Lord.

Thus it is manifest that the attempt to found ordination on Acts xiii. is not only a total failure in every point of view, but strikes a blow at his undervived apostleship and his testimony of the truth, as well as at the veracity of God's word. Those who imposed hands on Barnabas and Saul never had their important place ; and in fact, before this act they themselves had been teaching the church in Antioch as well as preaching to those without. Evidently they had held the highest place among those that were then labouring there.

My conviction then cannot but be, that the imposition of their fellow-labourers' hands in this case was a most orderly act of interest and of prayerful communion ; it was in no wise a pretension to confer an authority which they did not possess. But, if this case fails, there is no other as regards Paul ; for it is remarkable that, when first brought to the Lord, it was so ordered that a simple brother laid his hands on him, and then the Holy Ghost was given to him. He who baptized the apostle was not an apostle : else it would have been said that it was one in that high position who gave Paul his authority. As it is, nobody can pretend that Ananias conferred anything of the sort on Paul.

How wise are the ways of God ! I remember well reading some years ago a book by a living dignitary of the Anglican establishment, in which he speaks of the absurdity of men in office claiming to be the sole persons to baptize. This he argued from this very case of

Ananias, as well as from Cornelius, etc. He pointed out that it was a layman, as people would call it now-a-days, an unofficial disciple, who was used purposely to baptize and lay hands on the greatest apostle the Lord ever gave to the church. It seems to have been just the same principle on the day of Pentecost; for, although Peter and the rest of the apostles no doubt baptized many, it may be doubted whether only they baptized three thousand in a day. So, when Peter went down to Cæsarea (Acts x.), instead of his baptizing as if it were his sole prerogative, "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." The other brethren—the unofficial brethren that accompanied him—must have baptized on that grave occasion.

Surely, if anything could destroy the notion of baptism having its validity from the authority of the apostle, such a fact is calculated to do so. What clergyman would think of doing this? Peter, then, was not, and could not have been, a clergyman. Suppose one looked, for instance, at an official in any particular religious system, is it conceivable that such a one would delegate his power or authority to these unknown Christian brethren? Especially, would he act thus on a most novel and critical occasion, without such a plea of numbers or necessity of circumstances as might be said of Pentecost? Has anybody ever heard of such a thing since the clergy began? It is not so that men do now. Their thoughts and habits are altogether changed from the truth of God in this matter. Far be it from me to say that the apostles Paul and Peter would have thought lightly of one preaching the word out of his own head, or out of unworthy motives—envy, strife, or covetousness. This would be a gross

evil, but not unknown of old (Phil. i.). But the clerical principle in no case remedies its worst forms, but rather sanctions by legitimating them. Again, ministry does not mean that Christians have a right to preach or teach ; for in truth no man has such a right : the Lord has the right to call and send, as He alone gives the needful gift. It is in this that the true principle is wholly opposed to what men call democratic. For democracy means that all rights flow from man's will. Christianity denies this, root and branch ; it affirms that the right is the Lord's entirely, and that He exercises His right by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Hence the choice is for God's glory ; and one way in which this is secured, is that, by choosing not many wise or learned or mighty or noble, God puts honour on the Crucified One, not on mere circumstances, as position or possession, family-birth, genius, ability, or acquirements. Rather does the Lord in the face of obstacles exercise His sovereign will, so that He gathers, so to speak, out of every sort. To the spiritual mind which delights in honouring the Second man and not the first, what can be more delightful ? In such a state as the present such a choice is precisely the best and wisest possible. What more deplorable than if He chose only from some particular class ? No, such is not the way of the Lord. Inasmuch as the church chiefly consists of the lowly, so is it with the greater part of those that minister. Thanks be to God, none is excluded from His grace or the service of Christ for natural circumstances. Thanks be to God, none is to be supposed fit for the Lord's service because he is learned, or noble, or rich, or anything else

in this world. Let us cast off all unworthy prejudices or prepossessions. We must be simply governed by the word of God and the evident will of our Lord Jesus.

The essential principle of ministry is, then, that, as the power is of the Holy Ghost (only just suited in form to the ability of the man who is called, but distinct from it), so on the other hand it is entirely in the Lord's hand. Therefore the assumption of the church to choose and authorize ministers, or to order their action, is a plain direct infringement of God's word and of Christ's authority. It is no question of any particular body; for I am sorry to think that wherever one looks—from the Pope of Rome down to the humblest pastor—this principle has found footing. A minister is regarded as an official of the system or denomination. There is no such thing in Christendom as a servant of Christ left free to do His will. And the reason is obvious: it would not help on the interests of the sect. He must be a priest of the Romish church, a clergyman of this body, a minister of that, and so on.

My brethren, if you are guided solely by the word and Spirit of God, you cannot fail to see that Christ alone calls and makes one *His* servant. Why should Christ's servant be a servant of man in divine things? Be content to serve Christ alone; you cannot serve two masters, as Christ has warned you. To serve Him only gives singleness of purpose and becoming dignity. This alone puts you in the place of dependence; this produces and sustains the only true and lawful independence. This I hold to be essential to the glory of Christ and our own allegiance to Him. There should assuredly be the freest scope given to that ministry. In the

history and epistles of scripture, never does even an apostle step between the least servant of Christ and his Master.

The evident feeling there is that, as it would be unbecoming for the little gifts to interfere with the greater ones, so it would be still less worthy for the greater ones to absorb or extinguish the less. There is no right sense of Christ's authority, no adequate value for His service, where any of these things are allowed to intrude and hinder. Yet such is the actual state. The apostles were hardly gone before this crop of evil showed itself; for, indeed, the germs were there before.

Take for instance Corinthians iii., already referred to: "I am of Paul, I am of Cephas." There were those who thought that Paul was immeasurably above every one else, as others had a jealousy of all but Peter; others again were swallowed up in Apollos. But what of some who set themselves against the rest, on the plea that we must beware of exalting man, and said "I am of Christ"? I have little doubt that these were the worst of all who thus troubled the church with their fleshly preferences. For the corruption of the best is ever worst; none certainly were flying more directly in the face of Him whom they professed to honour. It was a subtle self-assertion, and none the better because under His name. In vain do they pretend to honour the Master who despise those He has called to serve Him in serving them. In such cases the real object of idolatry is poor and paltry self, and in order to this the enemy suggests the name of the Lord as a convenient cover. For it would never succeed to put self forward: people would reject it of course. But it was a specious self-deceived deceiving to say that for their part they thought

it better to be taught of God and not man ; that, as for these ministers, it was well to beware, for it was evident that they all more or less set aside the congregation of the Lord, not giving sufficient place to their brethren and not owning the lordship of Christ. They counted it therefore more spiritual to look away from them all to Christ exclusively. Such thoughts, brethren, though they may look fair to some, are in my judgment based on the hollowest and falsest principle possible to conceive among Christians. For the express way in which the Lord Jesus is now glorified is by His Spirit here below ; and the Spirit works by the different members of Christ's body to the profit of all. So true is this that I believe it would be a calamity for the church if it had only the ministry of the apostle Paul ; and none would have resented this evil narrowness more than the ostensible object of such spurious homage.

Suppose it were possible to have the ministry of Paul, I do not hesitate to say that the church, if it shut itself from all but Paul, would be robbed of no small part of its food and other necessary supplies. Even the great apostle was not the most suited means of conveying all that grace had to communicate. The ministry of the least gift that Christ confers on the church is as necessary in its place as the ministry of the greatest. I maintain, therefore, that it is just as the arms of the body have a place more imposing than the toes, yet you cannot do well without the lower and lesser members for all that. They too have their place ; and if they are wrung or pinched, the whole body suffers not a little. The smallest member, if it gets out of joint or into a bad condition, as we know, may cause excru-

ating agony to the whole body. So undoubtedly it is with the spiritual body. It is this apostle who gives us the same analogy. The Lord has appointed these things for His own glory, and He is jealous over His own order. There is not much fear as a general rule that the more showy gifts will be despised; for a powerful ministry in the word will ordinarily have admirers, even though to a great extent it be not understood. On the other hand, wherever the Spirit of Christ works in power, there will be no jealousy of lesser lights, but anxious care that they may not be superseded or despised. What can be more happy than when we see men of greater power leaving room for the less; or, again, the least of these walking humbly, and giving the fullest place to those to whom grace has given more than to themselves?

Thus manifestly the church of God, and the ministry of Christ, are expressly intended to be a place not merely for the communication of gifts, but for the exercise of grace and patience, of the mind and the affections of Christ. Nothing keeps but the eye fixed upon His glory. This is God's aim by the Spirit.

Christian ministry is not a means of living for men, however right it may be that the servant should live by the gospel if he have no adequate resources in God's providence. It is a comely thing that those who minister in spiritual things should not only not want for carnal things, but that fruits of loving care and honour should abound even if there be not absolute need; for one could scarce devise a greater humiliation and loss for the church than to be in circumstances where apparently their affections could not be drawn

out. Suppose an assembly where none were needy and only rich men addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints and of the gospel! It were far better for the assembly if the rich moved off, or at least took care not to stifle the activity of love in their poorer brethren. It is a calamity when rich men patronize and saints sink into clients,—a twofold snare, and a permanent dishonour to the Lord. Let the rich seek objects outside the place they live in, that the poorest brother may not be hindered from knowing the acceptance of his mite, and the value of his quota in all that concerns Christ. It is of prime moment that the heart of all, even to the destitute widow or child, be drawn out in active, gracious, intelligent interest and sympathy as to the church or the gospel. Wherever patronage intrudes and is allowed, there will surely be “death in the pot,” and, in the end, disappointment to the patrons, if not the danger of covetousness to the dependents, who will be apt to feel that there is no good reason why they should practise generous self-denial; for wealthier men supply more than is wanted, and why then should the poor contribute? Thus are they taught to count themselves and their offerings of comparatively no moment, whereas grace and wisdom would carefully instil the contrary.

Do not imagine that this is a fanciful picture. I am persuaded that not a little of the kind has too often injured those called “brethren” in some quarters. Occasionally there has been a disposition on the part of men of large means to be lavishly ready and forward in settling everything. They ought to beware and leave room for others—yea, for all. They need not fear for

love. The assembly is one, and many places might well and wisely receive a share of what in their own locality would be almost unalloyed evil. Whatever gives undue importance to wealth is as evil as the slighting of the least member of Christ. Ministry according to the world manages these things, according to Christ it corrects and directs them to His praise.

It is good that those who have the means should use all as faithful stewards, but never so as to stifle love or dignity in the lowliest saint of God. Let us not forget the poor but blessed widow with her two mites. Instead of telling her that it would be more prudent for her to keep the two mites, the rich may learn how poor are their gifts in comparison, and seek to have their hearts drawn out as hers was in devotedness and faith God-ward.

Thus ministry is a large theme, and serves to connect the homeliest matters with the glory of Christ, which casts its bright light over all the details, and alone secures its truest honour.

Christian ministry is spoiled if made a question of present distinction in the world and filthy lucre. And do not let us think of danger for other people only; let us beware for ourselves. There are none exposed to greater perils than those who are brought outside the camp to Christ, bearing His reproach. Not that one has the smallest doubt of the right path for the faithful in the present ruinous state of the church. Scripture leaves no hesitation as to this for those who have confidence in it by the Spirit. At the same time it is a path where a careless foot may trip, where none is exempt from the constant danger of being dragged

to one side or another. The path of Christ needs the hand of Christ to keep one steady in it. The only guiding star is Himself, seen on high, and soon about to come for us. Shut your eyes to that which attracts nature, and unflinchingly carry out what you know to be the revealed will of the Lord. Do not join parties or allow party feeling. There is not a little of this sort which we have to guard against.

Exercised according to the word of God, ministry is an invaluable means of helping souls and keeping things straight. But the true principle, it must be repeated, is this: whatever gift Christ gives, He has given for use. If it be asked on this,—What is to become of gifted women; for surely some of them have such power in the Spirit? I answer that undoubtedly they have gifts, and ought to use them too. It is not intended for a woman, more than a man, to put the light under the bushel. The Lord holds us responsible to profit by and use His gifts. Only we must remember that the woman, not being a man, is to act as becomes a Christian woman. We must not forget that it is no question of privileges in Christ, where there is no difference, but of public action in His name, where we must have His warrant. Now there is a propriety in this, and very strongly is this insisted on, and by true-hearted intelligent souls recognised as in the Bible. Never there do we hear of a woman preaching the gospel. In the East, for women to go forth publicly to proclaim the glad tidings in the crowd would seem utterly wanting in decorum. In the West, men do not require such severe seclusion in females; yet is there a wide gap between the happy liberty they enjoy and the

forgetfulness that they belong to a sex whose best place is the home circle, or that which approximates to it in visiting the sick and poor, the young and old.

It appears to me then, that the thought of women going forward in public to preach the gospel is unknown to scripture, often as we find women employed in delicate, difficult, and extraordinary errands. Not, of course, that women might not freely declare the glad tidings to needy souls, for they clearly ought to tell of Christ diligently, and far and wide; but there are bounds prescribed, and a seemliness which may not be sacrificed. For no otherwise speaks the word of God. Never do we hear of a Christian female preaching to the world.

The question might be raised as to the Christian assembly. Surely, as some think, they may be allowed to speak in the church or congregation of holy men and women, where lawless ways are intolerable, and the Spirit acts freely for Christ's glory. But no, says scripture; this is the very place where they are commanded to be silent. As to the world the question is not even raised; as to the church the question is ruled in the negative by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture does not in the smallest degree supersede the value of woman's service, as well as her seeking the good of souls individually. We know (Acts xxi.) that the four daughters of Philip prophesied. These pious women had the highest character of gift for ministry in the word. Where did they prophesy? Certainly not in the assembly. They probably prophesied in their father's house, which seems a fitting and the fittest place for them. In this case we must remember the principle laid down in 1 Corinthians xi. 3-16. For

1 Corinthians xiv. 34, 35 ; 1 Timothy ii. 11, 12, are conclusive as to that which has been affirmed ; and, undoubtedly, the more you search, so much the more you will find in scripture that every truth falls into its proper place. No one duty destroys another ; the word of God is in perfect harmony with itself when really understood. Our haste sometimes, flesh's will always, sets one passage in opposition to another. But the believer does not make haste, and, desiring to do the will of God, knows the truth through grace.

Having but touched upon these important topics, I must not omit to say a word on elders, as it might be thought that the subject was passed by designedly, or at least with negligence. There is not the smallest reason for evading it, inasmuch as the light of scripture enables one to furnish a clear, distinct statement on what is generally misunderstood.

In Christendom elders are habitually confounded with ministers of the word ; even Presbyterians, who ought at least to be right in this, make the same mistake here as their neighbours. Hence an elder is never included in any scriptural list of gifts (Rom. xii. ; 1 Cor. xii. ; Eph. iv. ; 1 Pet. iv.). They had a grave and responsible post, but they might never preach. Their business was to lead or rule, exhort and rebuke (1 Tim. iii. 5, v. 17 ; Tit. i. 9). An elder must be apt to teach, and might have the gift of a teacher ; but his position as an elder was something distinct from, and other than, a gift. Whatever may have been the fact among the Jews, where the beginning of eldership is not unveiled to us, it is certain from the Acts of the Apostles (xiv. 23) and the Pastoral Epistles that

elders were by apostolic authority, personally or by delegate, invested with a local charge or an outward authority of rule within a certain circumscribed sphere (*κατ' ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ πόλιν*).

In some of the churches of old, as, for instance, Ephesus and Philippi and elsewhere, we hear of elders or bishops, of whom there was always a plurality in the same assembly. They were different names for the same persons and the same thing. The notion of elders or presbyters and bishops being different is mere ignorance or prejudice, if the authority that decides be God's word *in* apostolic times, not tradition *since*. In scripture they are always of the same extent, the same functionary and same function, only with a different name from a different point of view. Hence the comparison of Acts xx. 17 with verse 28 proves not merely, as dishonest controversialists say, that bishops are presbyters, but that presbyters and bishops are identical, which is a widely different statement. I doubt that any Christian teacher who is entitled to be heard on this subject, no matter who or where he may be, if he be only possessed of competent knowledge, would venture to impugn what I am saying on this decisive passage of scripture. It used to be contested by divines of the last and former centuries; but although one may not think much of progress in the nineteenth century, I am glad to say that hardly any one would dispute this now; and I am speaking now even of scholars attached to episcopacy. It is all but universally acknowledged that the elders and bishops of scripture were not two classes, but the selfsame persons and office.

It has been already remarked that they were appointed or chosen by due authority. Persons might ask, "Have you then elders or bishops now?" I answer, No. This however is from no indisposition to receive those whom God raises up, but because none can have elders or bishops without apostolic authority in person or by delegate to appoint them. Hence, if we have not duly chosen elders, *you* have them not one whit more than we. The difference is, that you pretend to what you have not, while we confess the truth.

Nobody at this time has scripturally authenticated elders, not having true apostles to appoint them. You cannot have them because you want the requisite authority for appointing them according to God's word. There are many religious societies which have them in name; but whether it is a gain to have them thus irregularly, without the authority needful to validate them scripturally, judge for yourselves.

We are all familiar with the fact that they have plenty of elders in Scotland, of Established, Free, and I know not how many other sorts. We are at home, too, with the fact that in England they claim to have them, disguised, it is true, under other names; and this not in the national Establishment only, but in the various associations of Nonconformists and even in the Society of Friends. So, too, it is abroad, far off or nearer home.

At the same time I am bold to say that in Scotland as in England, or in any other country, they may be styled presbyters as much as men please, but they are no more presbyters scripturally appointed than the other members of their flock. It is easy enough to call

a person a presbyter ; but it is another thing to recognise them as such according to the word of God. But it is into this we are now inquiring :—What is the truth of eldership according to scripture? not the value of the name when only given by man in a way altogether different from that only rule of divine authority.

There the essential condition of duly constituting one a presbyter or bishop is, that, *besides* having the necessary qualifications (personal, relative, and circumstantial), he was chosen as such by an apostle or an apostolic delegate, like Timothy or Titus. Thus chosen, they were put in that position in the assembly before they exercised their office. This probably was what induced people to imagine the idea of apostolic succession, and to invent it by a fiction, since God provided none. They saw that apostles were necessary to appoint elders or bishops. But scripture gives no warrant for expecting the continuance of divinely-given apostles. Hence they fell upon the theory of succession, yielding to the assumed necessity for a constant appointment of elders. But they have no scripture. The men who are loudest in their cry of order are really therefore convicted of the gravest disorder and presumption.

The fabric of holy orders is built on the sand. They cannot truly defend it by the word of God. In scripture there is no authority for what they are doing, nor anything like it. It is, therefore, however well meant, as mistaken and really rebellious an assumption as appointing magistrates without the seal of the realm.

Such is the fatal net in which most Christian bodies have involved themselves. How much better to do

what scripture warrants, using our gifts in the church of God or without elsewhere going a hair's breadth beyond what it directs or allows us to do ?

The Presbyterians, it is true, do not pretend to apostolic succession ; they do not claim to have apostles or their delegates ; but they fall into at least as great an evil on the other side ; for they share between the people and the presbytery that choice and authority which scripture attributes to apostles or their duly commissioned delegates. Will they dare to say, with the New Testament before their eyes, that an ordinary minister was competent to exercise a function which we see there committed only to Paul or Barnabas, to Timothy or Titus ?

It is evident that Timothy had a charge over elders or bishops, and that ordinary ministers at Crete could not do what Titus was authorized to do. Presbyterianism and Congregationalism dislocate and deny this beautiful order of scripture, and, by a gross error, let the congregations choose the elders !

But in the word of God there is no such thought as a congregation choosing elders, and then another man or other men appointing them. Such confusion was unknown where God arranged. Would that all were content to bow to revealed facts and truths, and to learn the wisdom of His ways !

Before the apostles closed their career, the declension of the church was palpable, and its ruin irretrievably at hand, if not come. God would not then provide the highest authority to sanction what was slipping more and more from Himself, or to keep up external local order in presence of such growing unfaithfulness overspreading the church as a whole.

In modern times, when Protestant efforts for truth, honest but unintelligent, added to the ecclesiastical chaos, one can understand how wise was the seeming oversight, but really intentional omission, to provide the means of providing elders, any more than apostles, legitimately ; as otherwise they must have legitimated the existing confusions of Christendom, which would be as far as possible from the mind of God.

Is it thought that God does not provide amply for the guidance and blessing of His people in the worst of times ? There could be no greater mistake. His grace abounds in the richest way, but not so as to annul His moral testimony to His own word against man's corruption and self-will. He gives all that is for His own glory, and our blessing, spite of all the church's sin. For—mark it well—to be a ruler, leader, or chief (*προϊστάμενος* or *ἡγούμενος*) is quite distinct from being an elder. Thus, in Acts xv. 22, 23, Jude, Barsabas, and Silas we see distinguished from the elders, but yet recognised by all as chief (*ἡγουμένοις*) men among the brethren ; and so it is elsewhere. These two were even said to be prophets (ver. 32).

Undoubtedly the elders ruled, but many servants of Christ ruled who were not elders, and some of them in spheres incomparably larger than that of an elder. Weigh the very passage (Rom. xii.) which has been read, where ruling is maintained without the least reference to elders.

“ He that ruleth, [let him do it] with diligence.” Is it argued that an elder may be meant though not named ? I answer that no apostle had ever been in Rome up to that time, nor any one delegated to do apostolic work in that great city ; consequently there

was no one to appoint elders. Hence the force of the passage. There were gifts of Christ, and among them some necessarily not as yet, if ever, chosen elders; and yet they were rulers. Such a recognition as this has been a comforting word to many a heart, and often a great assurance to servants of Christ in the present perplexity of the church. There are, and will always be, rulers raised up of God, as long as the good of saints calls for them; although the condition of the church is such that they have not and cannot have the official status of elders, because God has not seen fit to perpetuate the needed ordaining authority. I would ask any grave Christian which of the two, in his conscientious judgment, is the best—a real ruler, or a sham elder? This seems exactly the point to which matters come on this head—to be a ruler according to the gift of Christ, or an elder according to a spurious apostolic succession, or the equally unauthorized choice of a congregation, with or without a make-weight ceremony of men who have not the slightest authority from the word of God for it.

But observe another ominous and patent fact. So glaringly is the present state of things in collision with the word of God that there is now sprung up a new kind of official never heard of in apostolic days—the individual called “the minister.” Who ever heard of him in scripture?

There is no such person or office there as that which is commonly known as “*the minister*.” Not to speak of elders, we hear of rulers, preachers, teachers, pastors, ministers in the word, and other ways too, according to what we have been endeavouring to ascertain; and I doubt not that your consciences have gone along

with me, led by the word of God. There were gifts differing, and consequently ministers differing in the same church. There might be many; as in the church at Antioch we heard of Simeon, Manaen, Lucius, Barnabas, and Saul,—various labourers having different gifts, and harmoniously using them. Such is the right principle. It requires no little grace among the companions in labour. This can be dispensed with when a man has the place all to himself; which saves from much difficulty, no doubt, but it sacrifices the will of the Lord. What can be more miserable for those who love His name? Who can deny it? The one-man system is clean contrary to scripture. Is this a light matter? It is to those who deny its Divine and permanent authority. Say not that this is a secondary or unpractical question. A bad conscience can plead this because it fears the truth which condemns the course it chooses to follow. Are you prepared to hold to scripture, or will you yield to unbelief and go on in disobedience, because you have been hitherto unfaithful? Why not look to God for grace to follow as He leads from day to day? Why not begin with humbling yourselves for your blind zeal in so long defending human tradition and fighting against the word of God? Are you indifferent to the fact that you have been systematically slighting what so nearly concerns the Lord's glory? Most of us have known the sorrow; many of us have learnt better through grace. We know what it was to have been merely following the track of our fathers, or at best what we ourselves were attracted to when converted, before making it a distinct question for prayer and the word of God. Certainly it is a great mercy to think of our parents, as well as our

own souls, brought to the Lord ; but the Divine object in all mercies, past and present, is that we may be strengthened to do the will of the Lord now, and henceforth grow in it with increasing fervour and simplicity.

I pray you then, hold fast to the truth of God's word. Search the scriptures, and fear not to obey. The things which puzzle most when not understood illustrate His grace and wisdom when once seen. Thus, when the church was evidently breaking up into parties, and there was to be no longer the one manifested assembly of God on earth, the apostles disappeared. After this the mass fell into ever-swelling corruptions through the admission of Jewish and heathen principles, and sects and parties split off, and at length Popery, etc., and Protestantism with its manifold denominations. In such a state the officials would be only those of a denomination, instead of being bishops set in the flock by the Holy Spirit. The Lord accordingly withdrew the means of imparting a true scriptural charge, when the condition of the church falsified His testimony. So far from finding fault, then, with that which looks anomalous in making it impossible to impart His stamp on that which is spurious, I bless God for the fact that an order which is only human has not the smallest just claim, whatever its pretension, to have God's sanction. From the non-descript minister of a sect, from elders who lack the sole authority which scripture acknowledges, you are driven to reality. It becomes more and more a stand-up fight between infidelity and superstition on one hand, on the other the word of God and the Holy Ghost. Which, then, is your choice ? Infidelity is abandoning scripture as fast as it can ; superstition is

perverting scripture to maintain the way that it loves ; and both will be found united against the written word. The reality is finding its true place in conflict with them both, not without the joy of the Lord and His known will. May we cleave to God and to the word of His grace ! Manifold difficulties may be experienced ; but He knows how to solve them for us by the Spirit's use of His word.

The subject of ministry is vast and has various points of view, with many details not touched on to-night. I have evaded none ; at the same time to enumerate all at once would be impossible. My desire has been, trusting in the Lord's guidance, to say what I could on it at this time with simplicity and earnestness, with the clearest proof from His word as to His will, on which depends your duty, for they are correlative. May it be yours, then, first to learn what His will is, and then to cleave to it ; and this in a spirit of grace and humility, as becomes such as we are, especially in a day of evil and confusion ! Is it not true, that many of us have found the truth too much for our measure of practical grace ? Have we not been sometimes lifted up, as well as harsh, too ready to find fault with others and to correct mistakes in those who could hardly be expected to receive it, where, therefore, if there had been more grace on our part, we should have allowed many things to pass ? For why force good so as to do evil by an unseemly way ? On every ground, and more urgently, as things are, should we see to it, brethren, that, holding fast the truth uncompromisingly, we may walk in love and lowliness. The Lord make us more simple and devoted to His own name and glory !