

THE
CHARACTER OF OFFICE
IN THE
PRESENT DISPENSATION.

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ON THE CHARACTER OF OFFICE IN THE PRESENT DISPENSATION.

It is remarkable how the Lord, when He has led us a little way by faith in simplicity of dependence on Him, provides, by the intervention of His gracious loving-kindness and guidance, for the exigency of circumstances, which the failings of men produce around us ; thereby teaching us to depend on Him for circumstances, as well as for ourselves ; and keeping us (the great position of truth) in continual dependence, that we may, in our feebleness, learn the fulness of His resources and the faithfulness of His love. His watchful care thus keeps us leaning on it, as our only security from the power of selfishness and evil. Men, in all circumstances, shrink from the sense of dependence—dependence upon God : it requires faith. They are willing to trust upon man present, not upon God to their eyes absent. Though a thing to be learned—this is the great lesson of the Christian dispensation—the character of all sanctity. It is true of righteousness in the Christian dispensation, and of course, therefore, ever in truth ; and it is true in every circumstance of individual life, and of the necessities of the Church. The book of Numbers, the history of the Israelities, is a lesson of this—a lesson of faith. We get out of Egypt, not knowing perhaps how, whither, or where we are going, only that we are leaving Egypt : but when Canaan is our constant hope, the wilderness is our constant way ; whether our journey be long or short, of vigour, of attainment, or of self-earned weariness of unbelief, it is still through the wilderness ; and God is there with us teaching us faith, teaching us to depend upon God, where there is nothing else to depend upon. There may be green spots from Him who gives rivers in

the wilderness ; yea from our own souls rivers may flow, fed from the Rock that never fails : at the commandment of the Lord we may journey ; at the commandment of the Lord we may rest awhile ; manna may daily surround our camp, surely fed every morning's early dawn ; but we are still in the wilderness, in entire dependence upon God, earning to enjoy, in the well-taught lesson of whence the enjoyment really comes. The losing the sense of this was the very mark of guilt in the Israelites in the land.—“ A Syrian ready to perish ” was their constant confession in their faith, when they brought the first fruits of that good land, a land of vallies, and watered with the dew of heaven, a land where the Lord's eyes continually were. This is our continual failing in the service of the Church, namely, in the sense of entire dependence. There is nothing so hard to the human heart as constant dependence. When faith fails, we constantly find out where we are : it is the wilderness or God : nothing is so foolish as self-dependence ; for, in every deed, it is God or the wilderness. Thus it is in the righteous position of the Church's exigence—apt to loathe the light food, but conducted ever of God.

But there is another state of things far worse than this, when Babylon has carried the body of the people away, i.e. the reluctance of the residue to stay in dependence of faith, and their determination to go down into Egypt for help, where judgment would surely overtake them. Such is the continual tendency of the human heart : such help is the Church therefore continually seeking. But the Church is not of this world, even as Christ is not of this world. And how is Christ not of this world ? Surely in spirit and in character He is not of it, as it is an evil world, unholy, opposite to God. When his spotless-excellency passed through, it was unscathed, though passing through every scene that wearies and bows down our frail and feeble hearts. But it was with other thoughts also that Jesus was not of this world, and so said He of His disciples. He was not of it, but of heaven — the Lord from heaven ; and we are not of it, but from thence, associated with Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and who is now separate from sinners, made higher than the

heavens, now in manifested association (i. e. to faith, as the object of it there), in the accomplishment of what forms the dispensation in the heavens. The founding of the dispensation upon the accomplishment of the exaltation of its Head, is of the greatest importance, because it is the ground of ascertained righteousness and its extent, and the seal of the character of the whole dispensation. It belongs, as being rejected in its Head from the world, to the heavenlies. But it is not merely as the result of the treatment of the Lord and His being glorified, that the dispensation had such a character, and held such a place: in the purpose of God it had no other place. It was the secret of God hidden from ages and generations, and formed an extraordinary break in the dispensations, to the rejection, for their unbelief, of the proper earthly people of God—a forming, *out of* the earth but not *for* it, a body for Christ—a heavenly people associated with Him in the glory in which He should be and should reign, when the full time was come, over the earth, in those times of restitution which should come from the presence of the Lord—a system forming no part of the earthly system, though carried on through the death of Christ in the forming of its members in it, but that when all things are gathered together in one in Christ, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, these should be associates of His glory, in whom it and the riches of His grace should be shewn, given them in Christ Jesus before the world began, according to the gift of the Father;—a purpose formed for Christ’s especial and personal glory before the worlds, and kept secret till the time of his sending down the Spirit after the actual glory was accomplished, after He had entered, in risen Manhood, into the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.

The Church has sought to settle itself here; but it has no place on the earth. It may shew forth heavenly glory here according to that given to it; but it has no place here, but in glory with Christ in heavenly places at His appearing. We, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

This subject, as to the special distinctness of the dispensation, has been treated of in a former number, in

an article under the title of "The Secret of God," and therefore I do not enter into it at large here. I believe it to be the most important point for the Church to consider now. Looked at as an earthly dispensation, it merely fills up, in detailed exercise of grace, the gap in the regular earthly order of God's counsels, made by the rejection of the Jews on the covenant of legal prescribed righteousness, in the refusal of the Messiah, till their reception again under the new covenant in the way of grace on their repentance—but, though making a most instructive parenthesis, it forms no part of the regular order of God's earthly plans, but is merely an interruption of them, to give a fuller character and meaning to them. As to the thing introduced, we are called to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is not the place or time of His glory : our calling therefore is not at all here ; but when Christ who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in glory : ministration upon earth is merely to this purpose. The moment there is a minding of earthly things, there is enmity to the cross of Christ ; for "our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ : who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." The Jewish system was a system of derived earthly authority : and while the Church was simply among them, it never lost its earthly character entirely : it was open at any time to the return of the Lord, and was formed upon the order of derivative authority from Him when He had not yet ascended into glory, though it was accompanied by the Spirit, which enabled them to testify to His ascended glory : but they were Jews ; and they maintained the character of the earthly system so far as it was associated with the risen Saviour, the hope of Israel : for that which was identified with the resurrection of Christ, was the "sure mercies of David."

Thus we find the Lord telling them, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me : and *ye also* shall bear witness of me, because ye have been with me from the

beginning.” Accordingly, we find the eleven choosing Jewishly by lot, (before the descent of the Holy Ghost from heaven, the witness of the glory), one to be a witness with them of the resurrection, one who accompanied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them. So, in the Sermon to those who came together on hearing of the tongues, we read “ This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are witnesses :” and then he uses the descent of the Holy Ghost as the witness of His exaltation. Again, in the sermon in Solomon’s porch, “ Whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses,” and then goes on with a sermon purely Jewish. In Acts v. 22, the double witness is directly referred to, and distinguished. So the Lord breathed into His disciples, after the resurrection, the Spirit of God, saying, “ Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” “ Whose sins ye remit,” &c. Subsequently they received the Holy Ghost, the witness of exalted glory.

Thus, the Apostles became the heads of derivative power apparently (at any rate the existing depositaries of authority ; for derivative commission was never conferred upon them), and stood before the world the founders of the Church among the Jews, with commission to extend it to all nations. But the Lord, save in the testimony of apostasy by the Apostle John in the Revelation, gives us no authentic account of any such transmission of it through the world. It formed no part of the record ; nothing on which the Church of God had to rest for its direction. It is remarkable, too, that the prayer of our Lord in the 17th of St. John was *literally fulfilled* in the Jewish Church, in the 1st chap. of the Acts of the Apostles, in them who were one together in the unity of those who believed on Him through their word, their separation out of the world, even to the surrender of their goods, and the witness thus afforded to it, praising God and having favour with all the people, great grace being upon them all. Here the scene all but closes ; such we see not elsewhere at all. This was the Church of those connected with Christ in the flesh, who had seen Him in the resurrection, and derived their authority from Him in earthly association, though endued with power from on high ;

ignorant of the times when the kingdom should be restored to Israel, but knowing that the heavens had received Him who was able, and was to do it; and looking for the repentance of the people that He might return.

But that people did not repent. Another witness was raised up, when this witness of His resurrection was refused and the power of the Holy Ghost in it rejected, to declare Jesus at the right hand of God; and to shew, demonstratively in his power, that they were doing as their Fathers had ever done—resisting the Holy Ghost; but this was, in fact, a testimony against them for their previous rejection of the Apostolic word and power recorded in the previous chapters, and it is closed by the testimony of seeing heaven now opened, launching the Church into a new scene, a scene of death to itself, but into which it entered by the perception of heaven open, and Jesus seen there. With this, accordingly, Jewish testimony to it as a Church closed. Jesus was not seen sitting as we see Him in spirit, but standing at once to receive His suffering Church. Here the Jewish scene finally closed till they should say, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,” accomplishing this word of the Lord, and the view of him in heaven thus opened to the Church. Individuals might be converted and doubtless were; but the order of Jewish ministry ceased: heretofore it had been confined to Jerusalem, and in regular witness by the Apostles, eye-witnesses of His resurrection to the Jews, and filling up and arranging the necessary offices, as we read in the Acts. But death and the heavenlies were now the portion of the Church of God; its earthly order and continuance gone: and though Peter preached among the Jews, and the rest we know not from Scripture where, succession and order as to them we find not in Scripture at all. There is no authentic statement as to where any of them went, no Scriptural statement at all, save that Peter continued his labours as Apostle of the circumcision (the only place he holds in Scripture), and that the Apostles continued at Jerusalem, as we find in the Acts and other parts of the Apostolic writings. But another scene now opened. The heavenlies we have now seen as

the positive known and only portion of the Church ; for the earthlies were Jewish, and they had rejected the testimony of Christ risen and exalted by the Holy Ghost, from the Apostles and Stephen. Stephen's ministry was suited to this : chosen among the Hellenists, he formed the link, having purchased to himself a good degree and great boldness to bear witness, not as an eye-witness but by the Holy Ghost, of Christ. Accordingly this is entirely his charge, not "We cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard," as Peter says to the Rulers, but the witness of the rejection of the Holy Ghost ; of which being full, he saw Jesus in the heavenlies.

Thus he formed the link between Jewish rejection and the position and state of the Church which followed.

And what succeeds ? Not Jewish order, but sovereign grace approving itself by the energy of the Spirit.

They were all scattered abroad except the Apostles, lest it should seem derived from them, "and they that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word." Who sent them ? Persecution. Who enabled them ? The grace and Spirit of God. And it reached the Gentiles. There was no Gentile Church but by what in these days is called *irregularity*—what is really the *sovereignty* of the grace by which any Gentile is called in the extraordinary and seemingly irregular act of God ; for salvation is of the Jews : a Jewish Jesus is not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—but a glorified Jesus doth what seemeth good unto the glory of the grace of which He is now the indiscriminate (as to men), but sure distributor. But the character of the change which took place, is at once shewn by this dispersion, and universal preaching wherever they went. The ordinary Christians preceded the Apostles, that it might be plainly not derived from them. The whole matter then, to justify any thing, was "The hand of the Lord was with them, and many believed," a very irregular and out-of-the-way thing for human nature, but which God has ordered as the way of salvation. Thus we find the instantaneous cessation of derivative arrangement, in the Jewish rejection of the Apostles, and the whole dispensation, as carried on upon earth, assuming a new character.

This was the actual breaking of the earthly order, as the former scene with Stephen was the closing of the Jewish possibility of the dispensation.

But a new scene now opens : the regular Gentile form and order of the dispensation in the hands of the Apostle Paul, the Apostle of the uncircumcision, the Apostle of the Gentiles. Did he then derive it from the Apostles ? or was he an indeed successor to our Lord by earthly appointment and derivation ? No ; in no wise. It was his continual boast that it was not so : his continual conflict with Judaizing teachers, what was often charged on him, as though he needed it, with which they pressed his spirit, but which he as sternly and steadily refused, withstanding them who had such authority to the face. He is the type of the dispensation. Every dispensation has its character, from the manner in which Christ is manifested and introduced in it ; and its order from Him under whom it takes its rise as to ministration. God, not yet known to the Church in covenant, but the same God revealed as Almighty, was the dispensation to Abraham called out to trust in Him, and gave its character to the path in which he had to walk in hope.

Christ, for now it was in covenant, revealed as Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was that under which Moses the leader in the wilderness, and Joshua in the land, led in succession the children of Israel under the order of successional priesthood for ever.

Christ manifested as Messiah, God manifest in the flesh, the end of the law for righteousness, the head of all Jewish order, was He whom they should have received ; and He could give and did give His derived authority to the Apostles whom he had chosen—Christ risen, still a Jewish hope, the securer of the sure mercies of David, was He whom they rejected, in spite of the testimony of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Christ glorified and supreme, the hope to every Jew scattered abroad and every Gentile sinner, the witness of sovereign grace, whatever the failure in evil. Those in whom it was deposited, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, formed the characteristic of the time in which the Spirit wrought by them. So of the twelve : Christ was the true Vine, not the no-

minal Israel, and they the branches, deriving their authority from Him as the Patriarchs from Israel; the dispensation thus far taking its entire and orderly character from them. It was a Jewish, though a Christian thing—that is, it was Jewish in its present order: it began at Jerusalem; but this ceased as a line when the risen Christ was rejected. The grace of God flowed in through the sandy desert and wilderness of the world, to make green, where it flowed, what it found buried in evil in it, when no watering of the tree which he had planted could cause it to bring forth good fruit to His glory and its own profit and acceptance.

And as the Spirit went, like the wind, where it listed, every one that was born of it was, according to the measure of the grace, the witness of the grace that he had received; for God had not lit candles to put them under bushels. St. Paul became the head and characterising agent of the dispensation among the Gentiles, not derivative but efficient. Hence God made him so powerful and so tried against derivative mission. “I received it,” says he, “not of man *nor by man*, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him up from the dead.” So of the Gospel which he preached, he certified them he was zealous of this point, he neither received it of man, neither was he taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ: and he gives this general character of himself, “Last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time,” as an *ektroma* (ἐκτρώμα): and this character attaches to the whole dispensation, an extraordinary arrangement and provision, something *ektromatal*, born out of due time, for the time present, till the earthly system is just ready to be restored, but belonging entirely to the heavenlies, having no earthly derivation or connection, in its power, with the succession of that order which was first outwardly established. It derived its stream higher up from the same source, though recognising it in its place (see Gal. ii). If it had such connection, what was all St. Paul’s reasoning about? or why did he take such pains to prove it did not so derive itself—why the Spirit of God to refute the notion of St. Paul’s derivative character when he preached the same doctrine, and held the same truths? It was the grand testimony to the break of successional authority, which

was Jewish; the Church, as a separate thing for glory, being now set on this unearthly footing on its own basis of apprehension of it by the Spirit,

Accordingly, the evidence which the Apostle affords of his Apostolate is never derivative, or that he had authority from others; but, "If I am not an Apostle unto others, doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine Apostleship are ye in the Lord:" "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, . . . examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates?" "Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." So his argument, as to the dispensation, is "When He ascended up on high, . . . he gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets," &c. Now the twelve were Apostles, and had the express name from our Lord's commission, before He ascended up on high at all. Yet they do not come into the Apostle's contemplation in spirit at all—i. e. in any *such* character, because they did not, in that state, constitute a part of the dispensation of gift, and authority by gift, of which he was the minister and expounder. This was associated with the ascended glory of Christ—"When He ascended up on high He gave." Accordingly, when the Apostle was called, he was called not as knowing Christ after the flesh (if he had he would know Him no more); but as one, who, as a Jew, in ignorance indeed, had consented to that very act against Stephen which shewed the rejection of the Jews; and was a killing apostle of the Sanhedrim, who had been so guilty, to find any of those who called upon His name: he was identified, not with the believing, but with the unbelieving portion of the Jews, when the question was between them, and he was not a Christian at all while the Church had this character. He was the witness of the calling of grace, and the perception of supreme glory. The manner of his call was declarative of both. He was in the career of opposition to Christ, and was arrested to be the witness of His glory, and of whatever had been revealed to him—

not of His earthly career, to that he had been a spiritual stranger: not of His fellowship when risen with His brethren; from that he had been a careless outcast, or a bitter opposer to it, but of His ascended glory: not the patient tracing with slow understanding the unfolding glory of the Man Jesus conversant among them, till it followed Him through the apparent death of all their hopes by the resurrection, "being seen of them forty days," into the known certainty of His exaltation, following Him to the clouds in which He should one day appear again so coming, and the witness of where He was, because the Spirit had been sent down from the Father; but the sudden and unlooked-for perception of the heavenly glory of the Lord, above the brightness of the sun; and finding that *this* was Jesus,—that is, beginning at the glory, the heavenly glory, and aware that he saw and heard the Lord speaking from heaven,—he asks and finds that this glorified One, this glorious Lord, was Jesus whom he was persecuting. Hence his mission was wholly of the glory in its source, not a witness of the suffering and a partaker of the glory to be revealed, but a witness of the glory and a partaker of the sufferings; and so ever preaching this mystery among the Gentiles, "Christ in you the hope of glory." This then was the calling of Paul, a sovereign calling by grace, revealing the Son in Him—one born out of due time; and this, when the Church was entirely heavenly, entirely underived, and necessarily rejecting derivation, or he would have denied the character of his calling, and lost the authority of his mission, for the Jewish things would have remained. It was heavenly, underivative—of grace, and by revelation, and that of the glory, and drew all its character and all its evidence from this; and this is carefully insisted on by him, and urged by the Spirit of God. The ordination of the Apostle stamped the seal on the same truth. First it was secured by the divine counsels that he should preach and testify, within and without synagogues and congregations, concerning the Lord Jesus: without anything further than the calling spoken of, he preached the faith which he had once destroyed, as he himself expresses it, "As it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also

believe, and therefore speak ;” as the other Apostles, “ We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” And so is the energy of the Holy Ghost ever ; whether it be the sure resurrection of Jesus, the revealed glory of the Lord ; or with Jeremiah, in derision daily because of his words to the people,—it “ is in his heart as a burning fire shut up in his bones ; he was weary with forbearing and could not.” If in liberty there was the rejoicing as being counted worthy to suffer shame ; if reluctant and tried by the abounding of iniquity in a state ready to be judged, the Word of the Lord was more powerful than the fears, though on every side,—“ he believed and therefore spake.” The glory of the Lord must be vindicated ; and it becomes a positive responsibility. Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set upon a candlestick ? “ For there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested ; neither was anything kept secret but that it should come abroad :” and it is *our* business to manifest it in the truth and energy of the Spirit ; therefore “ If any man have ears to hear let him hear ;” and “ Take heed what ye hear : with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you, and to you that hear shall more be given.”

Hence we also find the Apostle declaring, “ When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were Apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days ; but other of the Apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.” Fourteen years after, he went up ; but it was by revelation ; and in conference he found that those who seemed to be somewhat, added nothing to him : and this was the point with him. It was no haughtiness of spirit, and he was willing to try his word by theirs ; but he found they could add nothing ; and they owned the grace that was in him, though he derived no authority from them the appointed Apostles of the Lord, and recognised none in them save

in the sphere which God had allotted to them ; and they owned the grace of God, which was in him. When need was, he withstood them to the face, because they were to be blamed who were insisting upon the old ordinances. To such things he would give subjection, no, not for an hour.

And what after was his career, because of the glory revealed to him, his ordination as men speak, if he did not go up to those who were apostles before him ? The energy of the Spirit, consequent on the revelation of the Lord, still held its character in securing the breaking through the Apostolic succession. There was no derivative link from the Lord ; there was the revelation of the Lord and mission by Him, but no human ordination ; and in this he worked long, and not only in preaching or teaching strangers, but Barnabas, having gone to Tarsus to find him, brings him to Antioch ; and it came to pass that for a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church and taught much people. Who settled this ? Who appointed them here ? Who, Paul ? Who, Barnabas ? The grace of the Spirit of God wrought effectually in them ; and so the Apostles, as we have seen, had to judge : they *perceived the grace of God that was given to them*, and they gave them the right hand of fellowship. But still in public mission had they no derivative authority from some human ordination ? Or was not abstract Apostolic mission the ground on which it rested ? Long it had been so ; for God was securing, in every way, that human dependence, human derivation should be broken in upon, for its place was gone in the earth. The dispensation was one born out of due time ; it must prove itself by its energy from on high : so it had been proved both in preaching Christ and teaching the Church. But now Barnabas and Paul were to be sent out on a definite mission, and of course they had derived authority now. Whence ? Everything was still made to depend on the energy and calling of God. “ As certain prophets and teachers were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them ; and when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they

sent them away." Did the Apostle derive his authority, his Apostolic authority from his ordination? That would be a strange assertion; and he says he had it neither of nor by man. If this had been his first going forth to preach, it would have been almost impossible to have hindered the conclusion that it had its source in this, and the Apostolate would merely have been from the Church at Antioch. Therefore the Lord, to maintain the character of the dispensation, makes the Apostle not confer with flesh and blood, but immediately preach on his calling, and afterwards separates him merely to the particular work to which he was called, thus securing its underivative character. Its value, was the energy of the Spirit of God, because of the glory to be revealed, and the heavenly character of the dispensation which had its place in the glory (to be revealed), not here at all, and so ordered of God; otherwise Apostolic authority is derived from laymen by modern theory, self-ordained men, and the Apostle's assertion of his Apostolate falsified. But it was not: it was the Holy Ghost's separation of him to Himself for the work to which the Lord had called him, not the conferring a gift, as if his Apostolate depended on that mission; for this the Apostle denies at large in the Epistle to the Galatians, and passes by this going forth from Antioch entirely in the account of his mission which he gives to them, not the derivation of authority, for this he is equally earnest to deny.

In Paul, then, we have the founding of the service of this dispensation, resting on the fully recognised Apostleship, but caused, in the way it is founded, to be entirely of a heavenly character, springing from the Lord known then in the glory, having its working and energy by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and breaking in upon the derivative character of the Apostolate in the Jews by every careful arrangement of God; and the laying on of hands made little of as regards the Apostolate, and coming not from superior derivative authority, but entirely collaterally, that every link of the sort should be broken; and we may add, failing as to its earthly position, the moment the energy of the Spirit failed, the moment the unstained godliness which kept out evil, and

left the operations of the given Spirit free, failed.—Because the witness of the glory among the Gentiles was not to take the place of the glory, any more than the witness of the resurrection among the Jews was to take the place of the resurrection-glory (and it was only a witness, and therefore shewn only to the Apostles and Teachers among the Jews, and Paul for the Gentiles); but having been witnessed to fail as regards holding any place here, though effectual by the Spirit to them that believe, that abounding in hope through it, they might have an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, when He shall be manifested as the risen and glorified One, and sorrow and trial pass away. And though the filling up, as it were, was in the ascended glory, of which Paul was the special witness, and therefore he laboured more abundantly than they all, as the full testimony was to be given to the world in him, the continuous Gentile dispensation, yet, though he sustained it (by the energy of the Spirit) during his life, he knew well that it would end then, that is, as thus corporately held together,—“I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.” It was not that God, in the word of His grace to which He commended them as able to build them up, would not both gather out, and sanctify souls; but he felt and well knew that Ichabod was written on the dispensation, as on every other, till He comes who could sustain it enduringly. in the present power of a manifested life, Satan being bound from before Him. So it was among the Jews; the resurrection-denying Sadducees being raised against the testimony of that, as the self-righteous Pharisees against the ministry of the righteous one. So it was among the Gentiles, false teachers bringing into disrepute the energies of the Spirit of God, and thus devouring the flock, because of the feebleness of the shepherds. Oh how little does the Church know the service of crying and tears, the humility of mind which accompanies the watching the fold of Christ against the inroads of the enemy—of Satan. But it is gone. Yet there is One that is ever

faithful, who, be the shepherds ever so cowardly, does not let His scattered sheep be plucked out of His hand. To return to the subject.—

Let us turn to what we have afterwards, of the maintenance for a little season of the order of the Church of God before the re-assertion of the human derivative claim came to take the place of the Spirit of God. Let us take a glance at another part of Scripture, connected with this—laying on of hands. The Priesthood of Christ is the great characteristic of this dispensation, hereafter in glory manifested for joy and praise, now for the intercession and gifts of grace, still the same in person. It is ministering by the Spirit below, that it might be a witness to the world of what it was in Christ, to the Father of what He was; and this is what is brought out in John 17th; not the thing itself till the glory comes, and Christ appears, and we appear; but a witness of it by a supply of grace from Him who will appear, and we with Him, the fulness of this, of both that is, being in Christ. Hence it is that Paul (the Spirit as in the ministry of Paul) addresses the Hebrews—not the minister of the circumcision as speaking to them in their place, but as calling them out of that into the consciousness of the *heavenly* calling, speaking to them from the glory of the Son, so speaking and sustaining them in the present failure of the dispensation in them, by the security of an enduring Melchizedec Priesthood. “Wherefore,” says he, “Holy brethren, partakers of the *heavenly* calling, consider Christ Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession;” such an High Priest, because such as was not only harmless, undefiled, but was separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, “if He were on earth He should not be a Priest.” He is gone, not into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. But this was not all; for, as we have seen, when teaching the understanding of the mystery among the Gentiles, we find this ascending up on high was leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men; and “He gave,” &c. So we find many of the worthies said to act by faith, in Heb. xi. the great point

then of trial to the Christian Hebrews, testified of, as led by the Spirit, in their history in the Old Testament. But this is not the point I rest on here, but the comparative use he makes of the Priesthood in his Melchizedec character with the very circumstances here spoken of.—“Wherefore leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us,” he says, “go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, and of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment; and this we will do if God permit.” From the 4th to the 6th, he then speaks of those things which are the proper portion of the Church emerged out of its Jewish shape, the word of the beginning of Christ—that failure from this is irremediable after such patience of God; and in the rest speaks not therefore of the blessings of the given Spirit, save as to the danger of apostasy, but what, while Aaronical intermediate intercession indeed subsisted, their portion under the Melchizedec priesthood would be according to the word of the new covenant.—Of this the Holy Ghost was present witness. It is not my purpose to open this out now; I refer to it to shew the contrast of what were the first principles, or the word of the beginning of Christ, and the going on to perfection—i. e. the knowledge of the priesthood of Christ, the heavenly priesthood now witnessed to us by the presence of the Spirit. This is given in this Epistle on account of its object, merely in parenthesis, as the Gentile character of the dispensation and its danger of apostasy in chap. vi. 4—6. But we find, thereby, the way in which the Jewish elements are treated, not as though they had not their place, but the place they had explained; and they are Jewish elements. These they are:—The dead, we admit will be raised—Eternal judgment, or guilt, more properly, will be—Repentance from dead works is acknowledged to be needful—Baptisms and laying on of hands we have heard of as existing—but they constitute not the glory and power of the dispensation. The exercise of the Church’s mind about them proves its return to Judaizing principles. The notion of derivative authority is a positive lapse into

the order of the dispensation broken in upon by God, in its losing its Jewish character, and becoming the spiritual witness of the heavenly glory and fulness of Christ. Who is St. Paul's successor? I have heard of the successors of St. Peter, the direct and remarkable witness to the character of the association with derivative authority. It is all identified in the Gentile Church with Peter, who was not the Apostle of the Gentiles at all. It is the Judaizing of Gentilism, and the whole structure and fabric of the Church rests upon this. St. Paul, as the Apostle of the uncircumcision, held the witness of the character of this dispensation. Where is his successor? Of what see was he head? Was it Rome, the source of the present derived authority? And of what character then is all this derived authority? Where is it in Scripture? Let us see the facts a little further.—

It is not to be denied that St. Paul and the Presbytery laid their hands on Timothy; and a gift was in Timothy by the laying on of Paul's hands. The same does not appear in Titus at all, neither was he circumcised, which Timothy was; and Timothy, it appears, also laid hands upon others; for he is desired to do it suddenly on no man. They were thus special temporary deputies of St. Paul for setting the Churches in order in the things wanting, and appointing Elders: that they were not permanent Episcopal superintendants is clear, because when St. Paul passed by Ephesus, he addresses the Elders or Bishops there so as to demonstrate them not to be under the care of Timothy as from Apostolic-derived authority; and, in the second Epistle, charges him to come to him, as he does also Titus, to come to him at Nicopolis, wanting them to be with him: they were his chosen assistants in ordering the Churches, not his successors in them, unless he himself was bishop of both. We find St. John subsequently exercising the care under Christ, apostolically, of the Ephesian and other Churches in those parts,—quite inconsistent with the notion of Timothy's Episcopacy, derived from St. Paul. The energy of the Spirit then using whom it thought fit in an authority of office, we find, in the conception of the Church, derivative authority and jurisdiction nowhere. There was the conferring of

gift ; there was the ordering by those enabled to order ; there was the appointment of Elders in every city by those enabled to do so ; and the committal of doctrine to faithful men ; there was every care of the Church ; but no Apostolical derivative authority, except the false derivation of Peter, who was the Apostle of the circumcision, not of the uncircumcision, and whom the Scriptures only so recognise.

I would only add a few words as to the term “ordain.” There is no such word in the Scriptures in the modern sense of the term. Laying on of hands, to have been used in given instances, I do not at all deny. We have seen an Apostle ordained by laymen, afterwards conferring a gift by the same ordinance, and Timothy charged not to do it suddenly : but as we find the whole energy of the Church continually and long carried on without reference to it, so the word translated “ordain” has never, in Scripture, any connection with laying on of hands. Used or not used, it does not so state it, foreseeing, I am persuaded, the apostasy of the latter day.

In Acts i. 22. The expression here is merely an insertion of the translators.—See the original, where it merely is—“must one of them be a witness of the resurrection.”

The other passages are Acts xiv. 23 ; Tit. i. 5. In the one “chose” or “selected Elders”—in the latter, “appoint”—*Χειροτονέω* and *καθίστημι*.

There is no evidence that Timothy was left for such purpose. The Apostle states it to have been to guard doctrine, not for the purpose of appointing Elders. It is a general instruction as to his conduct in the Church, and it does not appear that laying on of hands was peculiar to any such office. It may have been used in it—they are never so connected in Scripture. When Elders are spoken of, laying on of hands is not ; when this is spoken of, they are not. It may have been used—there was no Scriptural identification. Probably it had a much wider scope. It was clearly used among the Jewish Christians for sickness and miracles, and by the Apostle for conferring gifts.

Further I would remark, that while the present case of the Church was exactly what would be consistent with the looking for the coming of the Lord, which possessed the

mind of the Apostle, the arrangement of prospective provision by derivative authority for future ages, was wholly inconsistent with it. When he was passing by Ephesus, in the consciousness that his personal care was closed, he warns the Elders himself on their own responsibility, although long before Timothy had been left to watch the place, though it would appear he did not stay there long. But the charge to Timothy was doctrine.

All present care was as to the way in which they would wait for the Lord, and committal of trust to those called and gifted where needed. But the arrangement of derivative authority would have been positive unbelief. Accordingly we find it broken among the Jews where it had this character, never attempted among the Gentiles where the glory was manifested ; but taken nominally from St. Peter, when he was gone who withstood these things to the face. Our present duty is every possible care of the Churches which God by his Spirit may enable us to take ; using with all diligence, humility and energy, with crying and tears, in which we surely may expect to use it, whatever he gives us to keep out Satan and feed the flock of God, where we may be, or He send us, but to lean in constant dependence for the constant supply of the Spirit of His grace, as our only ground of strength, and when we fail, commend them to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build them up, and give them an inheritance among them that are sanctified. He who knows this in spirit, will well know its sorrow, and how near it draws one to God. But all this is God's provision, and not for the wickedness of man, but for that failure, which in man's foolishness, shall cause all to centre in the glory of the Lord.

But there is one further point with which we must close. To the mere laying on of hands, if done spiritually, I know of no objection ; but reference, reference of the heart to derivative authority, has quite another character. It is Judaizing. It is, if insisted on, the principle of apostasy, as denying the power and calling of the Holy Ghost, or His competency to send, bless and sanctify. Wherever we return to Jewish practice as an imposed necessity, we return to the idolatry of the world. There was a special

sanction of worldly elements to a given purpose, and worldly elements, and glory, and honour, had their place while it was so ordered. The principles of the human heart which sought them, were dealt with on their own ground and terms, though in God's way; because, till the rejection of Christ, man and the world were not treated with as dead in trespasses and sins, as lying in wickedness, as at enmity with God; and riches, and honours, and worldly things, accompanied the love of wisdom, and human principles were dealt with. But in the rejection of Christ, the truth was brought fully out to light: the system of the world was set aside as to all its elements, as evil; God's sanction to it in any form or sort ceased. Its friendship was enmity with God. It was convinced of sin, and righteousness, set up not there but in the heavens, hid with God, revealed to faith. Judaism had been the place of righteousness, but iniquity was found in it; and being set aside, its principles became merely the simple worldly elements, without any sanction of God at all, and with merely their own worldly character; and the return to them became apostasy, return to the mere evil world. This is the Apostle's statement, the force of which is by no means in general sufficiently estimated. Writing to the Galatians, he says, "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire *again* to be in bondage? Ye observe," &c. That is, Gentiles become Christians, and looking to Jewish principles, were returning to their own old Gentile state: for what else was Judaizing now? It was simply joining the world, the ungodly world, which had not the Spirit of God in it,—ending in the flesh. So the Apostle argues in Col. ii. 19—23, especially ver. 20. Wherever, then, we turn to what is Jewish, (a right thing while God's work was of this world), we have the principle of apostasy in us: these things have the rudiments of the world in them, and we shall more or less join the world, which has not the Spirit, which is at enmity with God. And when, I would ask, has the Church looked to this derivative character as essential and

necessary that it has not joined the world? Receiving the principle of the world into its bosom, it soon fell into its practice; and this is the character, the form of apostasy: and the absence or subversion of justification by faith, and maintaining the doctrine of works for salvation, derived authority, and the Church in the world—have astonishingly gone together. However this may be—I refer to it here merely as a fact—certainly the Church so fell, at first gradually. Of this we may be sure, wherever we join any Jewish principle of ordinance now, as that which is our order, or obligatory on us, *we join the world in its rejected state*; for these are now demonstrated the profitless elements of the world, and nothing else, and the apostasy of the Church is involved in principle. With whatever patience we may bear with those subject to them while they are under them, their imposition, as though needful, is the snare of Satan leading us back whence we are delivered; for our conversation is in heaven. History will prove it as to facts, to be the apostasy of the Church, though the Spirit of God can alone prove or shew the principle. I do not reject conferred authority from God where it can be shewn in the grace of its exercise: derived authority from man I believe to be most evil, and to have apostasy in its character and principles.

The preceding observations may seem protracted; yet I think the importance of the principles warrants the deepest consideration of the subject. My own mind is very clear upon it in principle, though I may have much to learn in detail. I have endeavoured, under the Lord's mercy, to confine myself to the principles, to hurt no one, the matter being not of controversy but of deep and everlasting truth. It is a remarkable thing that—while almost all the Churches more or less hang on derivative authority—where it is settled as a system, we may note,—first, human derivation is its first basis as a principle;—secondly, it is connected entirely with St. Peter, and succession from him; and in conferring the authority, it uses the words used by the Lord in conferring it on His Jewish Apostles, previous to His ascension.