

Lecture 12 Spiritual Offices.

1 Tim. 3; Acts 6: 1-6.

"Another Comforter"

Thirteen Lectures on the Operations of the Holy Ghost.

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We were looking, on our last occasion, at the testimony of Scripture as to spiritual gifts, and tonight we shall see what the New Testament says as to what, for want of a better term, I call spiritual offices, for offices indeed they be, and most certainly, spiritual, that is connected with the Church of God, and only to be rightly fulfilled in the power of the Holy Ghost. These offices are those of bishops and deacons. The function of these is different, as their origin, and mode of appointment is different. We saw that spiritual gifts flow from the ascended Head of the body — the Lord Jesus, whereas these spiritual offices, you will find presently, take rise from the choice of the assembly, in one instance — that of deacons — and by the authority of the apostles, or delegates of the apostles, only in the other. Spiritual gifts can never be conferred by man, but local offices may be. When I say that spiritual gifts cannot be conferred by man, I do not forget that which the Holy Ghost tells us about Timothy. The apostle Paul bids him "stir up the gift of God, which is in thee, *by* the putting on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1: 6); and in another epistle he says, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, *with* the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim. 4: 14). Clearly, then, the reception by Timothy of this spiritual gift was, in a certain sense, instrumentally obtained through the apostle laying his hands on him; but let it be understood that, notwithstanding this, it flowed from the Lord, even as it is called "the gift of God." That Paul's hand was the instrumental means, the Greek particle *dia*, used in 2nd Tim. 1: 6, makes plain. It is the particle that expresses instrumental means, hence "*by* the putting on of my hands" is said. When you come to look at verse 14 of the fourth chapter of the first epistle you find Timothy received the gift "*with* the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." The Greek particle there used is *meta* — implying association *with* an act, not instrumental means. The laying on of the hands of the presbytery had nothing whatever to do with the imparting of the gift, save this, that they had full and hearty fellowship with Paul in the act, *by* which Timothy received the gift, hence, as far as the presbytery is concerned, it was only "*with* the laying on of hands." They were merely associated with Paul in his act by which Timothy received his gift.

I take this up because there is a great deal of uncertainty, as well as lack of scriptural information, in the minds of Christians, on the subject of ordination, which is supposed to be such an important and necessary prelude to a man's preaching the Word of God. Perhaps it may seem a little strong to say, but I say it before the Lord very fearlessly, that you cannot find in any

part of the New Testament, an instance of a man being set apart, *by man*, to preach the Gospel. You can find instances of men laying their hands upon one another, as in Timothy's case, and in another, which I shall show you presently, in the thirteenth of Acts; and you can find instances of certain men being set apart for local offices in the assembly — all that is perfectly granted — but, I repeat, to preach the Gospel, or as a warrant to minister in divine things, you never find, in all the New Testament, *man setting apart man*. The Lord reserves that prerogative to Himself.

I daresay some person will at once say, But what about the thirteenth of Acts? Well, turn to it. It is the stock passage for ordination. It is the passage to which Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, and many other denominationalists, bid you turn, as giving, what they suppose to be, divine warrant for ordination, and of man being set apart to preach the Gospel. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul," whose conversion, you recollect, took place long before, in the ninth of Acts, and who had been preaching the Gospel for a considerable time, previous to what you have recorded in the thirteenth of Acts. Nay, more, he had been recognised as a teacher for long. This we get in the eleventh chapter, "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and *taught* much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." That is to say, that Paul had been preaching, and teaching, long previous to that which you have recorded in the thirteenth chapter of Acts, and, so far from that scene carrying with it the thought that at that moment he was ordained for apostolic work, we have that set aside by his own writings, for in the epistle to the Galatians, he says, "Paul, an apostle, *not of men*, neither *by man*, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." His apostleship had nothing whatever to do with man, he says. Nor had his gifts as prophet and teacher, or evangelist, for he was all three, and more.

What, then, does Acts 13 really mean? 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. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia." Now one thing strikes us immediately here, and that is the independent action of the Holy Ghost. The action of the Holy Ghost, I need scarcely say, is always independent, for He is God. The only Being on earth who has a right to be independent is the Spirit of God. Wherever independency creeps into the Church, no matter in what way, you may depend upon it, it is sin, and not of God. The only one, I repeat, who has the right to be independent is the Spirit of God. Now the way in which He wrought, or what voice He used here, I do not say, but He made His voice heard in the assembly at Antioch, and said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul!" "And when they had fasted and prayed, and *laid their hands on them*, they sent them away." And it concludes, "So they being sent forth" — by the assembly? No! — "*by the Holy Ghost*, departed into Seleucia." Now, is there any doubt as to what this call of the Holy Ghost was? If there be in any one's mind a doubt, it is at once cleared up by following them, in their special missionary tour of a most interesting nature, the details of which occupy the whole of the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters.

When you come down to the twenty-fourth verse of chapter 14 you read, "After they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in

Perga, they went down into Attalia: and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been *recommended to the grace of God* for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14: 24-27). Nothing could be more simple. The Holy Ghost was leading them to go out to the Gentiles in Asia Minor. The assembly at Antioch found itself in hearty, and full fellowship with that, which the Holy Ghost was leading to, and this led them to place their hands upon them. As ordaining them? No! certainly not, the Holy Ghost had done that, but as identifying themselves, in prayer and interest, with them in what they were now going out to do. I believe that is perfectly competent for us to do. If any servant of God has a distinct sense that he has been called to go — say to heathen lands — to preach the Word of the Lord, and if his fellow-servants, and the assembly generally, are in full accord with him, then if they were to fast and pray, and lay hands on him, as expressive of their identification with him in his service to the Lord, they would be quite within the limits of the example of the Word of God. But if you put your hands on him, bear this in mind, that, should he have nothing, you would have to put your hand into your own pocket to help him: the identification then would be real and practical, not merely formal. The laying on of hands, in Scripture, carries with it most generally the thought of identification, and when you put your hands on any servant of God, you are thereby only identifying yourself with him in the work which he is going out to do. I do not think we should be any the worse, if we had more of this identification with the work of the Lord, in this respect. Ordination, as usually understood, is a mere figment of men's minds. The thought that men can set apart their brethren, to preach the Word of God, as giving them authority, or giving them the *locus standi* so to do, is nowhere within the covers of the New Testament. If it be there it can easily be produced, but it is not.

Nothing can be more foolish than to seek to base what is usually regarded as, and called ordination, on the scripture under consideration, and for this reason: the Holy Ghost had already classed Barnabas and Saul among the "prophets and teachers." In the twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians we read, "God hath set some in the church, *first* apostles, *secondarily* prophets, *thirdly* teachers." And are you going to reverse God's order, and say that numbers two and three appointed number one? What could be more foolish? Apostles were made such by the call of God, and they may have acted, and did act, in an authoritative way, but prophets and teachers could not select apostles; and if it be granted that Barnabas and Saul were already apostles — which they were — the ordination theory is blown to the winds. As I have shown you from Galatians, Paul's apostleship was not *of* men, nor *by* men, but from the Lord.

It is a great thing to be clear upon this point, because, observe, if there be the possession of a spiritual gift, the only one to whom the possessor of that gift is responsible, is to the Lord. He is responsible to go out in the exercise of that gift to the Lord, and where the Lord may lead him. He is no man's, and no Church's servant, though delighted to serve all, if in so doing he can please his Master. You find abundant evidences in the New Testament, of how the servants were at the disposal of the Lord only, not man. Take Apollos as an example. Paul wanted him to go to Corinth (see 1 Cor. 16: 12), but it was not his mind to go at that moment. One would have thought that Apollos would have bowed to the wish of the beloved apostle of the Gentiles. No! Apollos exercised his own discretion as a servant of Christ, where to go, and when. Paul nevertheless alludes to the fact that he wanted Apollos to go, but that he would not. A smaller man than Paul would have left that out of his letter, but Paul was a man with immense largeness

of heart, and he recorded this incident, no doubt, as showing how the responsibility of the servant must always be to the Lord, and that no one has a right to order the servant of Christ, but the Lord Himself. I need not tell you how the Church today, puts this man in this place, and that man in the other place, or how an assembly may call a man, or dismiss him. The whole thing is in the teeth of Scripture, let me say to you with all affection.

I turn now to that which is specially before us this evening — the functions of elders, and deacons, and most useful functionaries they are in the Church. The Lord loves His Church. He is Himself the Head of the body, and Lord of the assembly, and the Church which is bought with His own blood, and to whom He has given His own Spirit, He ever fosters in the tender affection of His heart, hence He always gives it what it needs. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church." "Nourisheth," that is, gives it food. "Cherisheth," that is, provides warmth. Food and warmth are the two things which man most needs to sustain him in his pathway here, and food and warmth are what the Lord gives His Church. He feeds and cherishes it, He takes care of it. Well now, I have no doubt that the *nourishing* is by the gifts of the Spirit, while the *cherishing* is in a great way connected with that which is before us this evening — the exercise of those spiritual desires, and functions, concerning which the apostle tells us, that he that desires them, desires a good thing.

First of all let us look at the chapter I have read in 1st Timothy, because it gives us a detailed account of the moral qualifications necessary for these two local offices, bishops and deacons. The office of a bishop, or overseer, as given in Scripture, is a distinctly *local* office, relating to an assembly in a given place, and not an ecclesiastical prelate, placed over scores of other servants of God, scattered over a large tract of country. Again, the office of a deacon is purely and distinctly a *local* office. The bishopric which Paul speaks of, is not the position of a solitary head over a diocese, but was always a conjoint office with others, equally styled bishops, overseers, or elders, and only conferred by apostolic choice and appointment, or by the appointment of an apostolic delegate. The apostle, in detailing what the moral qualifications of the bishop ought to be, begins, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." What is a bishop? He is an overseer. In the twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul was come to Miletus, "he sent to Ephesus, and called *the elders* of the Church." There were a multiplicity of elders in Ephesus, it is to be observed. "And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." You have two words in this chapter. He sent for "the elders," and called them "overseers." The latter word, in the original, is the same as is rendered "bishop" in the third of 1st Timothy. Similarly we read of the Lord as being "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2: 25). You thus see plainly enough that elders, or bishops, or overseers, not an elder, or a bishop, was the state of matters at Ephesus, in apostolic days, and such as was there the case, was also the case in more assemblies than one. In writing to the Philippians, the apostle addresses the epistle to the bishops and deacons, among others. "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Philip. 1: 1). Everything was then in beautiful order, and it is to be observed, that when Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy, the Church was in order. The assemblies were then walking in Divine order; and what we have in Timothy's first epistle are the instructions given to that servant of Christ how to behave himself, and to walk when the Church is in order. In his second

epistle he gets instructions how to walk, in the day when the Church is all in disorder, which is the day you and I are in.

The moral characteristics which are to mark the bishop are many, or such he may not be. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife." This does not necessarily mean that he must be married, but, being married, he must only have one wife. Polygamy was the commonest thing possible among the heathen, and thus one delivered from paganism might find himself with several dependent on him, while one only of them would now, of course, be recognised as his wife. For a bishop or a deacon to be in this position would be a scandal to the Church of God, and would outrage the spiritual as well as the moral sense of that Church.

Further, the bishop must be "vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach." He is to be a man able to communicate the thoughts of God. He must have moral qualifications, not necessarily a spiritual gift. If he had it, all the better, as you will find later, in the fifth chapter. I need not dwell on what he was not to be, though I daresay, many will think it rather a strange injunction, to tell such, that he was not to be a drunkard — "not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre." We are apt to forget that the assembly was only just formed, and that these saints had only just been delivered from the degrading and demoralising conditions that were round about them in heathendom. Bearing this in mind, you can easily understand such plain language.

The next thing enjoined is, that he must be "one that ruleth well his own house having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" It is impossible. He must have moral weight. He must be "not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." As the devil was lifted up by pride, and fell (see Ezek. 28: 13-19), so a young man might be puffed up with the position, and place of importance, that this official position necessarily gave him, in the local assembly. "Lest he fall into the condemnation of the devil," I take to mean his having the same judgment as Satan had, i.e. his being cast down, as he was, for his pride. Furthermore, "he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil." That is a different thing from the condemnation of the devil. If the man had not a good report, he would very soon yield to the enemy somewhere, because he dare not boldly withstand him. The devil would lay a snare, and he would have a tumble, for you may be sure that Satan would do his best to trip up one, who was selected for this position of prominence in the assembly.

The elders, or bishops, then, had this position of overseers, as caring for the saints, watching over them, seeking to help them, and looking after them in all spiritual matters. The object was that the members of Christ should answer to His love, and be maintained in happy order, and in the precious unity which was then realised. Wolves were abroad, and the bishops were to protect the flock from their ravages — a valuable office indeed. This position, however, was given to them by the apostles, and by them only, or by their delegates, as instructed by the apostles. It is instructive to note that the wife of the bishop, or elder, is only mentioned. She is not recognised, as having any position. She has no spiritual function. Woman's injunction is to be quiet. That is her place in the assembly. The deacon's wife, on the other hand (ver. 11), might

have a most important place, and fill a most useful niche in the assembly — as helping her husband — and therefore what she was to be, morally, is indicated.

When you come to 1 Tim. 5, Paul refers once more to the elders. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (ver. 17). We have therefore two kinds of elders. Those who merely took the oversight, in affectionate desire for the blessing of the assembly, and sought their well-being, their growth in Christ, and their walk in the ways of the Lord; and, secondly, those who, over and above these qualifications, had the ability to "labour in the word and doctrine." These were to be accounted worthy of double honour. You can understand the reason for this. The ability to minister the word of the Lord in the person of one, whose office takes him in and out amongst the saints, is very important. This ability partakes more of the nature of a teacher, than that of a pastor. I quite admit that the bishop would be like a pastor as to sentiments and feelings, but it is important to see and hold distinctly, and clearly, that a pastor is a gift from Christ for all the Church everywhere; whereas a bishop was a *local* officer, made so by the appointment and authority of the apostles, and was only a bishop in the assembly, where he was locally ordained. Further, their labour was not to be lightly esteemed, but responded to practically, for Paul goes on to say, "The scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And the labourer is worthy of his reward." Set apart in this way for the Lord's work, the elders very probably could follow no earthly calling, and consequently they would have to be looked after in temporal matters.

Timothy gets another word regarding bishops. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses," and then in verse 22 he is enjoined to "lay hands suddenly on no man." A little word, but very instructive. It has been said that elders were appointed by the laying on of hands. Scripture nowhere says so, that I am aware of, and the only passage that would seem to bear out such an idea is this, where Paul says, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." It is too vague to build a theory on, but the point clearly is that Timothy was to be very careful as to those with whom he identified himself, by laying on of his hands.

Turning back now to the Acts, you will find the apostle Paul himself carrying out his own instructions, and himself ordaining elders. "And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when *they* (the apostles) had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14: 21-23). Here clearly the elders were ordained by the apostles, and not chosen by the Church.

If you will now turn to Paul's epistle to Titus, you will find the latter's instructions on this point, — "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed (or commanded) thee" (Titus 1: 5). Then follow the details of the moral qualifications of the elder, in order that Titus might be very careful as to the men, whom he might put in that position. I say no more on this point beyond this, that it is abundantly plain, and clear from Scripture, that although elders were appointed in

apostolic ages, they were appointed *only* by the apostles, or by apostolic delegates — *quasi* apostles, if you please — such as Timothy or Titus.

But you may turn to me and say, Why are elders not appointed now in the assemblies of the saints gathered to the Lord's name? My answer to that is, If you are an apostle, appoint them. If you are a Timothy, or a Titus, appoint them; but if you be neither the one, nor the other, be wise, and do not assume power which you do not possess, and do not perpetuate, formally, an office which God has in His wisdom allowed to lapse, as I think I shall show you presently. In speaking of that I will take the two classes of officers together; but let us first look for a moment at the deacons.

The diaconal business was of a very different character from that of the elders. We had perhaps better turn to the sixth chapter of the Acts, where we shall see deacons in function, though not there called deacons, "And in these days, when the number of disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom *we may appoint* over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they *laid their hands* on them" (Acts 6: 1-6). The appointment of elders was very different from that of the deacons. Both were by apostolic power and authority, but it is remarkable, that the assembly here is permitted to choose the men, who were to be the distributors of its bounty. The case before us is very interesting. The assembly had grown. There were in the midst of it those who were poor, and others who were rich. Murmuring came in to spoil the beautiful harmony of the unity of the Spirit, and the expression of oneness which the Lord desired. What was the cure? Grace. The way to cure the murmurer is to act in grace, and there is nothing more powerful than the grace of Christ. "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." These Grecians, or Hellenists, were Jews born in Grecian or heathen lands. They murmured against the Hebrews (natives of Judea) "because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." They supposed the widows of the latter were favoured. In the assembly at Jerusalem there was a common fund, out of which the poor were helped, and the Grecians were neglected, as they thought.

The apostles, led by the Spirit, point out to the multitude that it was not for the assembly's profit, that they should leave the Word of God, and attend on, or serve tables. They would give themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Prayer comes first. It was the expression of their dependence upon God. Then follows the instruction, "Look ye out among you seven men of honest report." Some would say that we are not to hear the testimony of the world. God's Word says otherwise. The elder "*must have a good report of them that are without,*" and so here also. The world is a very good judge of an honest, or a dishonest Christian. It usually gives a very just and good judgment on such a point, and I have no objection to the judgment of the world in a matter of that sort. They were also to be "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." Well, this saying pleased the whole multitude, and whom did they choose? They chose seven men from

among the Hellenists, as their names seem to imply, the murmurers. They might have chosen three Grecians, and four Hebrews, or four Grecians and three Hebrews; but it was not so, the whole seven, chosen to be the distributors of the common fund, were selected from the company that had been grumbling about their neglected widows. What could be more beautiful than this display of the energy of the Spirit, and the activity of divine grace in the Church? Another point to observe is that the multitude is allowed to choose. That is perfectly right. You cannot choose a minister. A minister is the gift of Christ to the whole Church, and your ear ought to be ready to listen to him. Many of the beloved servants of Christ have got quite out of the circle of truth. While the Church of God could have no choice of those who should minister to it of the things of the Lord, it had a perfect right to choose those who should minister the things of this life, to any of the community, who had need of help out of the common fund. It was beautiful grace on the part of God to permit and enjoin this. The assembly thereon chose the seven men, "whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, *they laid their hands upon them.*" It was evidently by apostolic appointment that they were put into a position of authority, and responsibility likewise.

And now it is very instructive to notice, in passing, that the right and proper exercise of this diaconal function might and did lead, to very beautiful consequences in the history of some of the deacons. Two of these men, Stephen and Philip, are brought before us in later chapters of the Acts — not in connection with their diaconal work, but in connection with the exercise of the spiritual gifts which the Lord had given them. We recognise this, that the official position, the local office and function they exercised in Jerusalem, was the result of their appointment by the apostles, and that, after the discontinuance of their office, there flowed out what the seventh of Acts records of Stephen, and the eighth of Philip. In the seventh chapter Stephen is the vessel which the Holy Ghost, acting in His own beautiful and free way, uses to give God's final testimony to the Jews, and to bring forth the whole truth of their condition. He is not an apostle. No, the Holy Ghost picks up a man, — whose faith and power, independent of his office, we read of in Acts 6: 5-8, — and makes him His mouthpiece. It is Stephen that gives the magnificent testimony to Christ of the seventh chapter, whom he sees [standing] at the right hand of God, and he it is whom the Jews send after Christ with the message, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

In Acts 8, Philip goes to Samaria, and preaching the Gospel, earns the honourable distinction of being called Philip the evangelist." If you have not noticed it, I ask you to turn to Acts 21: 8. "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip *the evangelist*, which was one of the seven, and abode with him." The Holy Ghost gives that beautiful, and characteristic name to Philip of "the evangelist." This is an important and lovely illustration of one verse that occurred in the chapter I read, and to which I ask you to turn again. There you find, in speaking of deacons, in the thirteenth verse, Paul says, "They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." Before either Philip or Stephen began to preach they had graduated, not at college nor university, nor in any school of human learning or religious instruction, but they had graduated in the beautiful work of caring for the poor, the widow, and the needy. They had graduated in the exercise of their office as deacons in Jerusalem, and they purchased not only what is called "a good degree," but "great boldness in the

faith," and if you search the Bible from end to end, you will get nothing to eclipse the bold testimony of Stephen, as he stands before the Sanhedrim, and the rulers of Israel.

Returning to 1 Timothy 3, it is instructive to notice, in the eighth verse, that the deacons were to be "grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." There was to be care exercised in their choice. Then observe, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things," because, you see, the wife of a deacon — a man who was going in and out of houses, necessarily occupied with family details, and circumstances, possibly finding out need in many houses, and ministering to that need — might be a most valuable helpmeet to him. She might be much more delicate and tender in her dealings with need and sorrow, even than her husband. One delights in the wisdom of God, in thus settling the place a woman may have, in connection with her husband's office. Again we find, "They were to be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."

But Paul continues: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Beautiful words these! The Church is God's house — the assembly of the living God. Round about us is the world, but God is in His assembly. And the assembly, who are they? In any spot, where I can find God's people gathered upon the ground of the assembly, and according to the instructions that are given to that assembly, where the Lord has His place, and the Holy Ghost has His right place — that is the Church in principle. As a practical thing for faith, the assembly should be the meeting-place of every child of God, in whom dwells the Holy Ghost, and who is walking in faith and godliness. The Church is the pillar and ground of the truth still, spite of all failure. What you and I have to be exercised about, is this, that we should know where the truth is, and what the truth is, and then our hearts should be leal, and loyal to the truth. If I am connected with what is not the truth, then if I find it out, with the help of God, I will clear out of that association. I will thank any man to tell me if I am wrong, because I want to be right. If I am not right, I seek to be right, and that is what each one of you surely desires in your heart. It is a great thing to know the Word of God, and to do what the Word of God enjoins. The assembly of the living God is the pillar and ground of truth. In spite of the strife and dissension of the Church, God dwells still in His assembly, for the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and the truth will be here till the Lord comes. When His assembly is taken up, there will be a terrible scene of what is not the truth left behind. Truth is in the assembly of God, and the more tenaciously we hold on to the truth of the assembly, and to the will of the Lord with regard to the gifts, and their exercise therein and to the leading of the Holy Ghost, the better will it be for us.

Now, people often ask, Why have you not elders and deacons appointed in the assemblies of the saints? There are two reasons. First, as the effect of our failure and sin, from the time in which the later epistles were written which depict the ruin of the assembly, you have not the Church — all the saints in one place — together, over whom to appoint them; and, secondly, you have not a competent person to ordain them, even though all the Lord's people, in a given locality, were walking together. I do not doubt that where the saints are really gathered together in the Lord's name, and are seeking to act upon the instructions given to the assembly of God,

there are men performing the functions of elders, although they do not assume the name, or ape the office. Again, although the title of deacon has been dispensed with, there are men who are simply, and unaffectedly doing the work of such. It is a great mistake to assume, that because we have no right to 'ordain elders and deacons, everything is therefore in confusion, and that there is no resource. When I come to the second epistle to Timothy, where the Church is viewed as in disorder, I find the truth is committed to faithful men to teach others.

Just observe the wisdom of God in forbearing to perpetuate these local offices. We are confronted with facts, and so I speak plainly. The reason I judge that the Lord did not give instructions, that these offices should be perpetuated, was because He knew that the Church would fail to walk in unity, and would outwardly break up. Why, I could get a dozen so-called churches today, who have no communion or connection with one another, and if I were going amongst them I should find elders and deacons over all of them. What are they elders and deacons of? Ask them, and they will reply — Of such and such a congregation. I read in Scripture of the bishops and deacons of Philippi, and of the elders of the Church at Ephesus, and these were elders over all *the* Church in these towns — over the whole undivided assembly, and not over little fragments of the Church, as is the case today. I perhaps find a Christian man boasting in the position of holding a local office. He is an elder of such and such a church. Do they recognise you over the way? I ask him. Oh, no! we have no connection with the church over the way. Well, I would not give much for his eldership — it is not after the pattern of Scripture.

The wisdom of God is perfect. He saw what was coming, and therefore, I repeat, forbore to give instructions, and directions, for the perpetuation of these offices after the apostles' departure. He has not left us a warrant in His Word to appoint these officers, because He saw what the will of man would work — division. He would not have that division intensified by a part arrogating to itself that which only belongs to the whole. That the Church would lose her external unity, God foresaw, and therefore abstained from directing the appointment of the local officers, who, if appointed, would only emphasise the division which is round about us, by the mere assumption of the office, without the power, and position that He designed should go with it. You see the whole Church in Edinburgh today ought to be walking in unity, which, alas! it is not. If you say, Elders and deacons ought still to be appointed, I reply, If the apostle Paul came into Edinburgh today, where would he begin to appoint them? At this place where we are? Oh, no! Why not? Because we are not the Church. What he would have to say would be — You are all one; I must get you all together. He would get all the saints together, and I think he would then say — Now stay together. That is just what God wants, and it is the wisdom of God that has not perpetuated these offices, which, as now discharged, really help to keep the saints apart.

However much the saints of God may have fallen short of the mind of the Lord in this respect, the blessed Saviour loves His Church, and gives to it that which it needs, and which He sees good for it. What we have to do is to be simple and loyal, and not go on doing what is wrong. Let us not assume power, which we do not possess, to appoint to office. If we have learned the truth, let us hold it fast: and if we have not learned it, the sooner we do so the better will it be. "Buy the truth, and sell it not." It is priceless in its value. May the Lord give to you and me to know His truth more and more, and to seek to carry out His mind, as He unfolds it to us.