

# A Man in Christ; and, A Man of God.

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*2 Cor. 12; 1 Tim. 6: 6-12; 2 Tim. 3: 14-17, 2 Tim. 4: 1-8.*

## "Handfuls of Purpose" Part 3 (Miscellaneous, chapters 15 - 30).

*Let fall for eager Gleaners.*

*Thirty Addresses on Various Scripture Truths and Incidents*

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### CHAPTER 28 — A MAN IN CHRIST; AND, A MAN OF GOD.

You will observe, beloved friends, in these scriptures, the occurrence of two remarkable titles, "A man in Christ" and "A man of God." Of them I would speak for a few moments. A remarkable difference exists between the two.

Although every Christian be a man in Christ, it does not follow that he is, practically, what Paul calls a man of God. One gives us position, the other practice.

What a wonderful expression Paul opens with. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago . . . caught up to the third heaven."

Observe the effect of this on Paul. He kept it quiet for a long time. I rather think if some of us had such a revelation as he had, our brethren would have known about it very soon.

Now, what is a man in Christ? I tremble, lest I fail to convey the truth concerning it; but I will say what I trust may help the youngest soul here. If born of God, and possessing the Holy Ghost, you are "a man in Christ."

The history of the first man is very sad. Where does that history end? It only ends in sin, shame, and death, in the scene through which we are passing. The word *episkopos* occurs five times in the New Testament. Four times it is translated "bishop" (Phil. 1: 1; 1 Tim. 3: 2; Titus 1: 7; 1 Peter 2: 25), and once "overseer" (Acts 20: 28), and this is the real meaning of the Greek word. In addition we have the derivative word *episkope* occurring twice, and rendered "bishopric" in Acts 1: 20, and "office of a bishop" in 1 Timothy 3: 1.

The first time we get the word "overseer" is, as we have seen, in Acts 20. There we read, "And from Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus, and called the *elders* of the Church" (Acts 20: 17). In the course of his address to them, he says, "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" (Acts 20: 28). Thus the elders and overseers are but two words expressive of one office in this case.

Next we meet with the word in Paul's epistle to the Philippians. "Paul, and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the *bishops* and deacons" (Phil. 1: 1). The third mention is: "A *bishop* then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3: 2). "An overseer must be blameless;" this is clear from the previous verse. "If a man desire the oversight, he desireth a good work, — an overseer then must be blameless," and so on. Then we read: "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 thee: if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a *bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre" (Titus 1: 5-7). Titus is told to ordain "elders," and then the qualifications of an *overseer* are given.

The last and most conclusive use of the word is in 1 Peter 2: 25, "For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and *Bishop* of your souls." Have we all returned; have you returned? If not, lose no time, but return at once to Jesus, the "Overseer of your soul."

Let us now see what these elders were, and their qualifications. "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 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?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3: 1-7). It is clear that they were to be men of ascertained moral and spiritual weight, in the Assembly. Each was to be "the husband of one wife." Of course this was necessary, for polygamy was common then, and a man might have more than one wife before he was converted, and afterwards could not put them away, but it would preclude him from this office.

They were to be "apt to teach," likewise, hospitable, and having their own houses in order; and if they ruled well, we see elsewhere, they were to be much esteemed. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (1 Tim. 5: 17, 18).

Now I believe that many of us have been bred with the belief that it is competent to the Church now to ordain or appoint elders, but if we see from Scripture who ordained them, and how they were ordained at first, it will help us.

But first let me carry your minds back to see what the Church of God really is. It is composed of those who have been redeemed by Christ, been washed in His blood, born of the Spirit, possess a new nature, are sealed by the Holy Ghost, and are thus baptized into one body. The Church of God in any place was a company known as God's people, and, let me say, there was only one such company in one place, hence the postman would have known where to take a letter addressed to the Church of God. But it is not so now, nor could you open such a letter, nor could I. Who could open it? It would have to lie at the dead letter office till all the saints in the place should have come together, and then only could we open the letter.

In those early days, if we had asked the most wicked person in the place, they could have told you where the Church of God was. When the Church of God began, none but true children of God were in its ranks. You may quote the case of Ananias and Sapphira. That proves my statement. I am not going to discuss their state, but they were put out, God put them out by death, and we read, "Of the rest durst no man join himself to them" (Acts 5: 13). just as a wasp in a beehive is killed or driven out, so, if a false person did come in, the light was so great that he was manifested, and went out, or was put out. Would to God that it were so now.

Believers in Jesus are now linked with Him in glory, so that they are the members of His body, and such a thought as being a member of any other body is of man, if not of lower origin. No child of God should own such membership; it is not of God, and the New Testament thoroughly condemns the idea.

What we find in Scripture is that wherever the gospel was believed, the disciples were drawn together to the Lord's name. A little time passed, and then the apostles entered that Assembly for a definite purpose, and that was to ordain elders and deacons, not to appoint ministers, for there is no such thought in all Scripture. If there be, it can easily be found.

There is one scripture, I am aware, which is the stock passage for the so-called "ordination of ministers," but this, when examined, throws great light on this subject. "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. 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" (Acts 13: 1-3). Now, have you the coolness, not to say the audacity, to say that Barnabas and Paul were then ordained? Prophets and teachers ordain apostles! Impossible! "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (1 Cor. 12: 28).

The second and third would be ordaining the first in the Church, if your interpretation were correct. Again, I say, impossible! They were "*sent forth* by the Holy Ghost," and the brethren, prophets, and teachers if you will, knowing that "the apostles Barnabas and Paul" (for so they are styled in Acts 14: 14), were sent forth for a special work, did what was common then — they flung themselves into the mission with heart and soul — they fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on them. Did they ordain them? If so, to what? It could not be to preach, for Barnabas had come on the scene long before. In Acts 5: 36, 37, he had shown great devotedness in giving his

money. In Acts 9: 27, he had manifested great spiritual judgment in introducing Paul of Tarsus to the Assembly at Jerusalem, and that Assembly a little later had commissioned him to go and see the grace of God in Antioch (Acts 11: 22-24). Thereafter he brought Saul to Antioch, and together they taught that Assembly for a whole year, and then carried their bounty to Jerusalem (Acts 11: 25-30).

Paul's apostleship we know the source of, from his own pen. "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)" (Gal. 1: 1). As far as preaching is concerned, he began that at Damascus directly he was converted (*see* Acts 9: 19-22).

The laying-on of hands has a different meaning in various parts of Scripture. The action of those at Antioch was clearly only that of identification with these two servants when called to a special service. The Church of God at Antioch identified itself heart and soul with the special work of a missionary nature that Barnabas and Saul were called to, and when they had finished their tour and their work, they returned "to Antioch, from whence they had been *recommended* (not ordained) to the grace of God *for the work* which they had fulfilled" (Acts 14: 26).

In the course of that tour they visited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. Souls were saved, Assemblies formed, and afterwards we find the apostles returning, and confirming the disciples. More than that, enough time had passed by to reveal who were qualified to be elders in these Assemblies, so we read: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in whom they believed" (Acts 14: 23).

Now mark who it was that ordained these elders. I know some learned ones would say that the Assembly chose them, and then the apostles came along and formally installed them. I am no scholar myself, but I am assured by others, who know the Greek language intimately and accurately, that the word *cheirotonesantes*, in our version rendered "ordained," simply means "having chosen." Evidently it was the apostles that chose them (Acts 14: 23). And here let me say this is the only place in the New Testament where we see the apostles ordaining them. No doubt there were elders in Ephesus, as in Philippi, and Titus was told to appoint them in Crete (Titus 1: 5).

But then some may say, Were not the people that composed the Assembly the right ones to appoint them, as in the case of the deacons in Acts 6: 1-6? In no case do we read that hands were laid on elders. The only passage that looks like it, is where Paul says to Timothy: "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Tim. 5: 22). But this, I judge, has a much wider meaning.

Hands were laid on deacons, by the apostles, and by them in every case. In the case of the chosen seven, recorded in Acts 6, the Assembly who gave their money were to have the right to choose their stewards, but notice there, that it was the apostles who installed them in office. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. 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, and 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). All that were chosen were selected from the murmurers. Grace is the great cure for murmuring. It was the Grecians who murmured, and though not called deacons the seven who did the work of deacons were *all* Grecians. Not even four Grecians, and three Hebrews, but *all* Grecians. What a lesson as to the power of grace when it be active! We have seen clearly that it was the apostles or their delegates who chose elders, and they it was who laid their hands on the deacons, but you must remember that there was only *one church* in each city at that time. It was *the* Church of God, and embraced every believer.

We have noticed that Paul, in his charge to the elders at Ephesus, had said, "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" (Acts 20: 28). I return to this occasion for the reason that Paul in his first epistle to Timothy says, "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Tim. 1: 3). From this some have thought that Timothy was a bishop, and was left there to appoint them, but here in Acts 20: we see all the elders doing their work at Ephesus five years before Paul wrote to Timothy, so that theory will not hold good.

Let us now look at some other scriptures very briefly. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5: 17). We see here that there were some of the elders who "laboured in word and doctrine" yet they were not appointed as ministers, as men now say. How did they get this power to labour in word and doctrine? That alone came from Christ, and flowed from Him as the Head of the Body. It was the exercise of a spiritual gift, which the Lord had given them, and had nothing whatever to do with their official position as elders. They possessed this power, over and above their eldership, in no sense because of it. And to illustrate this we have also Philip, who was one of the seven deacons of Acts 6. The persecution arising after Stephen's death turned him out of office, so he went to Samaria, preached Christ, and the whole city is moved. It is abundantly plain that he had a gift — that of the evangelist — and he exercised his gift quite apart from his deaconship. To confound gift and office is to spoil both. They are distinct. Gift comes from Christ. Local office was always conferred by the apostles or their delegates.

Now, to come to another definite scripture, Titus, we are told, was left at Crete to appoint elders. Neither Timothy nor Titus were apostles, but apostolic delegates, who received from the apostles certain definite orders, and when Titus' work was done, Paul tells him to be diligent, to come to him to Nicapolis (Titus 3: 12). This shows that Titus was not the Bishop of Crete, as your English Bible says in its footnote.

The question now arises, Have we today the power to ordain elders and deacons? I say, No! Are you an apostle? No! Or sent by one, as Timothy or Titus? No! Then do not assume to do their work. You will probably retort, If there be no authority or power to appoint to these offices, why did God give them at the outset?

Your query is fair, but I think is not difficult to answer. At the first everything was in order, and such offices were comely, but God foresaw that His Church would all be broken up, and where was the value of perpetuating an office which, so far from keeping the sheep together, rather keeps them away from each other. You may say, That is strange, but I say, with no desire to wound any one, look at this city. The more carefully the respective elders of the different sections of Christendom do their work, the more effectually will they keep Christ's sheep apart. The more each diverse set of elders labour the more thoroughly will they keep the "Free" and "Established" and other churches separate, by the very fact of their trying to keep their flocks together.

The truth is, that man has gone on with a form, instead of understanding what God has given for an evil day. I ask you, Which is better, to do so, or humbly to take our place, as those who have not the power? Well then, you say to me, is there no rule in the Church? I thank God there is in His assemblies, yea, in every one, yet I deny emphatically and plainly any power for ordination, ministerial, episcopal, or diaconal.

There are two cogent reasons for not attempting to appoint either elders or deacons. First, we have not the competent ordaining power — i.e., apostles, or their delegates; and secondly, we have not *the* Church over whom to set them, if we had the power. It is, alas, broken in numberless fragments. Let me put the case this way. If Paul came into this city today, where would he begin to appoint them? Where is the Church? Broken up! Would he treat a fragment as the whole? Impossible! If he did so, he would but perpetuate the divisions which God's Word so condemns.

As to ministerial ordination, I will only say that it is unknown in the New Testament. In not one single case can it be shown that a man was set apart by men to preach the gospel. If it be there, it can be produced, but it is not. Christ, the Head of the Body, gives the needed gifts for that to whom He will, and His prerogative no man can set aside without loss.

There yet remains another scripture or two which I will touch upon, because it will help us to see that the Lord cares for His Church when man's will and disorder have spoiled His revealed order. He ever gives all she really needs. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you: and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5: 12, 13). Who were those? I judge they were not elders, for spiritually they were but a year old. Are there none such now? I rejoice to know that there are many over me in the Lord, and I rejoice to know that the Lord has given these — not ordination — but spiritual power, and you know water soon finds its level.

And now look at another scripture, where there is nothing ecclesiastical, and found in the last epistle we would have thought of looking at for light and guidance as to rule in the Assembly. "Remember them which have the *rule* over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" "Obey them that have the *rule* over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" "Salute all them that have the *rule* over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute' you" (Heb. 13: 7, 17,

24). What were these? They were guides? Does putting a man into an official place make him this? No! Verse 7 speaks for itself. A man who brings to you the Word of God in a moment of difficulty, so that you know it is God's Word, and your soul is guided by it, is a guide. You will own him as such, and remember him in your prayers, and welcome him, when he again comes along.

I own as a guide not one that takes a place as such, but one who brings me the Word of God, which does its work, and shows me my way. A guide may step out of a well-beaten path, to point out the way — well — let it be so, if it be the Word of God.

It is an immense comfort to know that, if apostles have ceased to be, and local offices are not to be perpetuated in the present ruined and broken state of the Church, the Lord in His tender love continues to His beloved people all they really need. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers He still gives, and guides He has always raised up when needed. The work of elders and deacons is done, without assuming the title, in every Assembly of God.

The guides show me the way from God's Word. Men with pastoral gift there are still to help the souls of the saints, specially in private. And we have teachers too for the saints inside. But let us never forget that all gifts are the common property of the Church. They belong to the whole, and not to some little section, and wherever I see a gifted man I claim him, as from the Lord, for the whole Church, and would to God that he would take his place in His Assembly as such.

I trust it is clear to your souls that ministry is distinct from these' local charges, which have disappeared, and so to continue them without divine authority is foolish — not to say sinful.