

# Lecture 7 — Gifts, Ministry, and Local Office.

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*Eph. 4: 7-12; 1 Tim. 3.*

from 'The Church: What is it?'

Ten lectures on the church of the New Testament seen to be established, endowed, united and free.

*W. T. P. Wolston, M.D., 1905.*

We have been looking from various points of view at the great truth of the gift of the Spirit, and now I want to draw your attention to the difference that there is between the *gift* of the Spirit and the *gifts* of the Spirit. Now every Christian has the gift of the Spirit; but it does not follow necessarily that every believer should have what is spoken of in Ephesians 4 as a spiritual gift. I should like also to show the way in which Scripture speaks of the exercise of these spiritual gifts, and what is the outcome thereof, and then allude briefly to the subject of elders and deacons, i.e., local office. In spiritual gifts, on the one hand, and local office on the other, when all was in its normal order, we have the expression of the tender love of Christ for His Assembly during His absence.

We read in Ephesians 5: 25-27, that "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (the *bygone* aspect of His love in death); that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word (the *present* aspect of that love, where the gifts and the, offices of elder and deacon may come in); that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." This last is the future aspect of His love, as well as being the eternal thought of God, who has called us, and, whether for time or eternity, made us to be accepted in the Beloved, "holy, and without blame before him in love." That is the place which Ephesians 1 now gives to every individual believer; while the verses just quoted show what the Assembly collectively will be for Christ in glory — His Bride, the partner of His everlasting joys.

In the meantime Christ has given all that love could give, as we read in chapter 5: "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5: 29). And what are nourishing and cherishing? Nourishing is food, and cherishing is warmth of affection. You have the truth ministered by the gifts the Lord gives — that is the nourishment, and saints need nourishment. And then, in the beautiful way in which elders and deacons come into the normal practical life of the Assembly, we have the thought of cherishing — that is, everything the body can need while here upon earth, that blessed Head in glory has given: not merely the ministry of all that He is to our souls to form us like Himself, but no detail of tender care for His own is wanting on His part.

There are three chapters where we have gifts brought before us. There is no detailed list of them in Scripture in one place. Some are alluded to in Romans 12, others in 1 Corinthians 12, and others here in Ephesians 4. The difference, I think, is this — the source and spring of the gifts, in Romans, is God; in 1 Corinthians 12 it is all the activity of the Holy Ghost; the gifts are traced for their source to the Spirit on earth "dividing to every man severally as he will," and now here (Eph. 4), it is the Lord, as the Head of the Body now in glory, who furnishes all that is essential for the edification of His Body, whatever it may be. He, in His sovereign grace selects certain vessels in which He is pleased to deposit a spiritual gift. That is important. It is not a question merely of some natural qualification — of ability to speak; that would not necessarily be the ministry of the Holy Ghost. A man might be a beautiful speaker, and yet there be no profit, power, or unction in what he said, because he is not the possessor of a spiritual gift. On the other hand, a man might not have natural eloquence, but, if he have this gift from Christ, his ministry is acceptable, gracious, comes with unction, and is for profit. Ministry — true ministry — is, then, the exercise of a spiritual gift.

"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (vers. 7, 8). As a man He went up. The source, therefore, of these gifts, is the ascended Christ in glory, and it is a great thing when people see that. It is not human education, though that is not to be despised and set aside; it is not a question of the natural capacity created in the vessel, though the gift of Christ will not be without this, much less that of college training through which men go to learn what men can teach them. No, the absolute and only source of spiritual gift is an ascended Christ, the Head of the Body. When He went up He "led captivity captive," the power of Satan was broken, and the great present proof of it is that He takes up those who have been Satan's captives, makes them the depositories of these gifts, and sends them out to deliver by the truth those who are as they were once.

Christ is now the Victor, Satan is defeated, and his captives are taken up by the Lord, who says, I shall put into them a gift, according to My sovereign pleasure, and I will make them the ministers of My grace in the spot of man's defeat, and where Satan's energy was seen on every hand. This action of the Lord, described in Ephesians 4: 8, is a quotation from Psalm 68: 18, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" — the last clause being omitted by Paul, the point being that men were to be the recipients of these spiritual gifts from the exalted Christ. Then they were to exercise them, and that is true ministry. When it is seen that ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift, which Christ has conferred, that makes every one who has received the gift responsible to the Lord, and dependent upon the Lord, for the exercise of his gift in its own particular sphere, whatever that sphere may be.

Now when it says, "And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (ver. 11), it does not mean He gave to them *to be* apostles, or *to be* prophets; but the man with his gift is given by Christ to His Body, the Church. "He gave some apostles, and some prophets," who had their place, as we have seen, at the foundation, and remain to us in their inspired writings; "and some evangelists," through whom the Church is gathered; "and some pastors and teachers." The last two gifts are bound together, for they usually

are combined in one person, and are found together in the ministry of the Word of God, by which the Church is built up and fed.

We have seen already what an important place the apostles and prophets held: "Ye are . . . built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2: 20). They laid the foundation, and when the foundation of a house is once laid, you do not need to be always at it; you then go on with the building. Consequently you would not expect to have them, in their living ministry, in this day. They remain with us, but only in their writings, and in the unfolding of the truth which God has preserved for us in the holy Scriptures, and that is where our faith rests.

Then as to evangelists: observe here that it is in the upbuilding of the body that the evangelist comes in. It is by this gift that God's grace goes out so largely to the world to save souls. and thus the Church is formed. In 1 Corinthians 12 there is no word of an evangelist. The omission of the evangelist there is easily apprehended. The Assembly as constituted on earth is before the apostle, and, of course, there the evangelist has no work — his business is outside to gather souls in. But here, where it is a question of "the perfecting of the saints," "the work of the ministry," and "the edifying of the body of Christ," you find the evangelist comes in. He is one who goes out with his heart full of the love of God, and full of love to men, to win them to Christ, He carries Christ to men, and seeks to bring men to Christ. He loves souls. It is not a question, again I say, of being able to speak with volubility and great natural power — the gifts of Christ are carefully distinguished from this kind of thing in Matthew 25: 15 — it is more the idea of a fisherman seeking to catch fish. It is a gift that deals with the individual soul as well as the multitude, as seen in Acts 16, "And we sat down, and spake unto the women" (ver. 13). It was quiet intercourse, the pressing of the claims of Christ, and the love of Christ on souls, and they were won.

The evangelist's place, however, is very important, because if there be no evangelists, there will be no gathered Assembly to be the object of the pastors' and teachers' care. There is a little tendency on the part of some to look down upon the evangelist. Regarding his work, I have heard it said, "It is only the gospel." But that is the revelation of the heart of God; and if you can bring the revelation of the heart of God into the midst of midnight darkness, sin, and misery, what a wonderful privilege. When people say they have got "beyond the gospel," they will very soon become like dry sticks, because they have got out of the current of God's love. The first work of God in souls is the new birth by His Word and Spirit, and this may be effected through the evangelist, who carries God's message, and brings the soul into the light and liberty of His grace. The ultimate object, however, of this work, is that the soul may be set consciously in its place in the body of Christ. If there be no winning of souls there can be no adding of stones to Christ's building, a consideration which every child of God and every local Assembly should weigh.

I think we ought to be careful today both to build, and to see into what we build. Many evangelists today are what are called "free-lances," they are not at all careful as to the present object of God for the souls who are converted through their ministry; indeed, many do not know where to bring them, everything is so out of order. Still there is a Divine order, and the evangelist, if labouring rightly, should work out from, and in fellowship with, the Assembly. He ought to be a downright backbone churchman, according to God's revelation of what the Church

is, and when he has got his stones out of the quarry — the world — he should know where to take them — viz., to God's Assembly. Many a man today does not know where to put them; he tips them on the road like a cart of stones, as it were, and is not exercised as to their being put in their right place in God's building. That is not Divine order. In Scripture all is very simple; the evangelist works and brings souls to the Assembly, where the pastors and teachers attend to them. But the evangelist is very unwise if he introduce his own converts into the Assembly. He should let others do that. He should bring them to those who were in Christ before them, who will need to be satisfied that they really are the children of God. That kind of testing is the porter's work. They keep the door of the house. We read of them in Solomon's days. Their *names* are given in 1 Chronicles 9: 17, 18; their *numbers*, four thousand, in 1 Chronicles 23: 5; their *courses* in 2 Chronicles 8: 14; and their *service* in 2 Chronicles 35: 15. Good porters are very valuable; they let in those who should be in the Assembly, and keep out the others.

The only man who is called an evangelist in Scripture is Philip. In Acts 8, he was doing a wonderful work in Samaria. Many were converted through his preaching and were baptized, and thus were admitted outwardly to the House of God. Simon the sorcerer was one who believed and was baptized, and I have no doubt Philip thought he had caught a big fish that day. Doubtless he was a sanguine man; and if an evangelist is not sanguine and hearty he will soon get damped and discouraged, because he will be sure to have much cold water thrown on him. People who cannot do his work are adepts at telling him how he should or should not do it. But presently Peter came down, bringing more spiritual power and perception, and his judgment regarding Simon was, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8: 21). Peter played the part of a porter that day and kept Simon out. Be thankful if you get souls converted, but do not attempt to pitchfork them into the Assembly. Let the porters handle them. The value of a good porter is that he lets in what ought to be inside, and keeps out those who should not be allowed to come in. The porter's work therefore is very important; it keeps the Assembly of God from defilement by the entrance of the unconverted and religiously unclean. Not that I mean that there is now any such formal office, but that the saints should have this godly care as to those who are admitted among them.

The next gifts mentioned here are the pastors and teachers. The pastor is more occupied with the need of the soul, the difficulties that crop up in the spiritual life of the dear sheep and lambs of Christ's flock. The pastor gets close to the person; he is a man who moves in and out among the saints, and seeks to help them, There are very few of them in evidence today. The reason, I judge, is this; they are hampered and hindered by their religious environment, and they fear to offend those whom they think have a special charge of people's souls. Thus many a Christ-given pastoral gift is dwarfed and blighted in Christendom's systems. The pastor's gift is very quiet and unobtrusive, for preaching is not the point with such. They love the sheep of Christ, seek their growth, their blessing, and are like a shepherd — going in and out among the sheep, taking out the thorns and briars that may have got in, and seeking to remedy anything that is wrong. It is very quiet, unobtrusive work, but very blessed, and most useful.

There is a notion that a "pastor" is a man set over a "congregation." That idea is in people's heads, but not in Scripture. There is no such thought in God's Word as a man being *a* pastor over *a* Church. Christ gave pastors to *the* Church, and if a man be a pastor, or a teacher, he is such for the whole Assembly.

The teacher is occupied with the book. The evangelist is working for souls *outside*; the pastor deals with the sheep *inside*; and the teacher digs, delves, and works away at *the Scriptures*; he finds them a perfect mine of hidden treasure, and then he brings out and imparts by his ministry the truth which is so blessed and so refreshing for our souls to heed.

The danger today is of pitting one gift against another. If you say, "I like the evangelists, but do not care so much for the teachers," you are very foolish, and also will remain very ignorant, because you are shutting your ears to what God is giving. And if you say, "I like the teachers, for I want instruction, but I do not think much of the evangelists," you are equally wrong, for they are both the gift of Christ. We must accept all that the Lord gives, and be thankful for everything.

When these gifts are seen working harmoniously together, how blessed it is. The evangelist goes out, seeks, wins, and gathers souls, and then they are brought to the Assembly. And what then? The Assembly lets them into her bosom where God dwells, where Jesus is known, where the Holy Spirit ministers Christ, and leads out the hearts of God's children in happy praise and worship. But you say, perhaps, "They are not very intelligent, these young converts." How intelligent were you and I when we were admitted to God's Assembly? I was exactly seven days old — converted one Sunday night in London, and in the bosom of a little Assembly of God's dear children a hundred miles down in the country, and breaking bread the next Sunday morning. That was very quick, you say. It was not too quick for me, nor for the Lord in His precious grace to me. I was very unintelligent, but I saw that a privilege was afforded me of taking my place with the Lord's people, to show forth His death in the breaking of bread, and I seized my opportunity and have never regretted it.

The affection that takes charge of the babes is a thing that ought to mark the Assembly of God, and I fear is somewhat lacking now-a-days. When a babe is born a nurse is needed. Three-quarters of the babes in this city that die, are badly nursed, or not well fed. There is some folly on the part of the nurse. And many that are born into the family of God are not well cared for. Who is to care for them? They ought to find a nurse among His saints. If you are seeking to serve Christ, *you* should take care of them and help them. If God's saints were more occupied in this way, there would be less time for profitless conversation. If we were busy helping each other, nurturing the newborn, and nourishing souls generally, we should find the body growing and the saints being perfected, and that is the way things are presented here, in Ephesians 4. It is a body, and it grows by the mutual activity of its various members, who play into each others' hands, so to speak, and the result is there is "the edifying of itself in love" (ver. 16).

I have little doubt that the special work of the pastor and the teacher is "the perfecting of the saints" individually; because it is of no use our knowing truth collectively and corporately unless we are individually in a spiritual state of nearness to Christ. That being lacking, there is the danger of becoming boastful, that we have truth and light, and are on the ground of the Church of God. None can say, "*We are it*," though we seek to walk in the truth of it; but, if there be not holiness, and growth individually in the knowledge of Christ and moral resemblance to Him, of what good is the possession of truth? None.

But a person might say to me, "We have been accustomed to understand that men who wrought after this sort, specially the pastors and teachers, had some kind of qualification or *locus standi* given them by man." Where is that taught in Scripture? That is my question put to you. What is the answer? Nowhere. You search the Scriptures of the New Testament till you find it. You will search long enough and in vain. Do I hear you say, "Then that is a deathblow to all the systems of Christendom." I admit it, but inasmuch as neither you nor I wrote the Scriptures, we are not responsible for the result of our inquiry, though we may be all the better for the discovery. But what about those people who are called "Ministers of Christ" — the clergy — who can be found on all hands today having an official position? Many of them are, no doubt, dear children of God, and real servants of Christ; but they have allowed themselves to be put into a position that most certainly the New Testament gives no warrant for. You may search it from Matthew to Revelation, and I am persuaded you will not find one single instance of a man being set apart to preach the gospel by man, nor of a man being set over a Church as *its* minister. You will say, "But surely there is such a thing as ordination." Certainly, but not to preach the Word of God. Spite of that God takes care that His Word shall be preached. We find in Acts 8, regarding the Assembly at Jerusalem, that when "they were *all* scattered abroad," they "went everywhere preaching the word" (see vers. 1 -4). Who ordained them?

You may reply, "What about Acts 13?" Let us look at it.

"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. So they, being *sent forth by the Holy Ghost*, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus" (vers. 1-4). That is a stock passage for ordination. The various sections of Christendom today say, "There is our warrant for ordination." We must examine that statement in the light of the fact that Barnabas and Saul (who is also called Paul) had *already* been preaching the Word of God for years, I do not know how many. Did the Assembly at Antioch set Paul and Barnabas apart for apostleship? They are both called apostles in Acts 14: 14. Perhaps you have not noticed in 1 Corinthians 12, it says, "And God hath set some in the church, *first* apostles, *secondarily* prophets, *thirdly* teachers" (ver. 28). That was God's order, and could numbers two and three appoint number one? No. Paul says in Galatians 1, "Paul, an apostle (not *of* men, neither *by* man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)" (ver. 1). Had man aught to do with his apostleship? Not a bit. He is emphatic on the point, and tells us also how he started his preaching. Read in the same chapter: "But 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*" (vers. 15, 16). He lets us know that his apostleship was directly from God, and that man had no hand in it whatever. When he had been converted and turned to the Lord, he "conferred not with flesh and blood," because a servant must be dependent on the Lord, and the Lord alone. What, then, is the meaning of Acts 13 — of the Assembly laying their hands on the apostles?

Observe, it was the Holy Ghost that said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." They were in a very nice state in that Assembly — a company of

priests in the happy exercise of their priesthood. They were ministering to the Lord, not to the people. Most people's idea of ministry is what comes to us; but there they *ministered to the Lord*. "And the Holy Ghost said" — the Spirit of God was in the House of God on earth, and His voice was heard, how I do not know" the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (ver. 2). The Assembly was in full fellowship with what the Holy Ghost was going to do, for "when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by" — the Assembly? No, — "by the Holy Ghost." What to do? To make this special missionary tour amongst the Gentiles, which was so blessed, and of which Acts 13 and 14 are so full. But you say, "They went forth from Antioch." Of course they did; and had the full fellowship of that Assembly in their work.

Now kindly look at the end of Acts 14. "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" (vers. 25-27). They go out with the full fellowship of the Assembly, and prayer, and the like, and having done their work they go back, and are able to tell what God had wrought. If servants of Christ did that now, they would very likely be accused of being occupied with themselves and their work; but People were very simple in those days.

I think the youngest child can see the force of the passage, and also what profound ignorance it evinces to try and squeeze ordination — which means the Church or its representatives giving a license or title to men to preach the Word of God — out of it. Both of these men had been preaching long previous to this tour. We read in Acts 9 that Paul "preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (ver. 20). This was at Damascus. Then later, "At Jerusalem he spake boldly in the name of the Lord" (ver. 29). Then of Barnabas we read that the Assembly at Jerusalem, having heard of God's work at Antioch, "sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." He here is seen preaching to the young converts, but after a while he desired the company and help of Paul, whom he had befriended at Jerusalem (see Acts 9: 26, 27). So we read: "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 *first called Christians* at Antioch" (Acts 11: 25, 26). The reason of this last statement, I conclude, was that there was so much of Christ in and about the disciples that they got the name of Christians.

These scriptures shatter the ordination theory as regards Barnabas and Saul absolutely, and equally so as to what is before us in Acts 13: 2-4, being a warrant for the ordination of ministers now-a-days. What took place was very simple, and the intent thereof very plain. The Holy Ghost separated Barnabas and Saul for a special service, and the Assembly identified itself with the apostles, as they laid their hands on them. The laying on of hands has several meanings in Scripture, but chiefly that of identification with, which is incontestably the purport of the action in this passage. There is nothing to hinder that being done today, so far as I see in God's Word. Suppose a gifted brother has the sense that the Lord has called him to go abroad to preach the

Word; the local Assembly where he has lived and laboured loves and values him, and prays for him in view of his new sphere of labour. I do not think they would be wrong if they also put their hands upon him. Only if you do this you must then be prepared to put your hand into your pocket to help him, or else your prayers are mere words, and your laying on of hands — signifying your identification with him — would be hypocritical, for you would not be really interested in the work. That is the idea of laying on of hands — identification. We must think whether he has anything to go out with, because "the labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10: 7).

The gifts given by Christ are for the good of the whole body, hence their disposition only Christ can order. The idea and practice abroad today, that men can be sent here and there, called and dismissed by Churches, has no foundation in Scripture — there is not a line of it there. That servants of Christ should be ordained for ministry by men, and may then be put into a clerical position by men, is equally a figment of man's mind. This ordering of the servants, and putting them here and there, is unknown in Scripture, and really contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. Not even an apostle would order a servant. Barnabas went a long journey, found Paul, and brought him to Antioch. That was all right, and showed the individual interest of each in the work of the Lord. To invite a servant of God is very nice; but he is responsible to take his orders from the Lord, and not from men.

Paul is very careful in regard to that. When Paul could not go to Corinth himself, he might and did wish that Apollos would go; but he would not, and Paul takes good care to tell us so. "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time" (1 Cor. 16: 12). Apollos had a sense, I take it, from the Lord, that the moment had not arrived for him to go to Corinth, and therefore he did not go. Paul deemed it advisable, but each servant was free, and could only act as guided by the Lord, and it was not at all clear to Apollos that the Lord called him to go. Paul records the circumstance to give the saints this truth, that in the exercise of his ministry the servant gets his orders from the Lord, and his supplies also. This great apostle could not direct Apollos to go here or there. I think a smaller man than Paul would have kept that fact back. Any one who had not a big heart and mind would not have written this. We do not usually publish our failures. Paul records it to maintain the sense of the individual freedom and responsibility of the servant of the Lord, to act before the Lord, and the Lord only.

Now let us look at the other side of the subject. There *is* such a thing in Scripture as ordination, but it does not appear in connection with the ministry of the Word, or the exercise of spiritual gifts. It is found in relation to that which, for want of a better term, is spoken of as "local office," i.e., elders and deacons. In 1 Timothy 3, we get the way in which the Spirit of God presents the truth as regards local functionaries, *i.e.*, the qualities they must have to fit them for ordination. There we read, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (ver. 1). "Bishop" is the same word as used in Acts 20, where Paul sends for the *elders* of the Church to meet him. "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*" (bishops) (ver. 28).

Thus these elders were bishops, or overseers. It is from the word *presbuteros*, an elder, that the formula of presbyterianism has come — the presbyter was an elder. How did the elder in Scripture become a bishop or overseer? The fact of his being an elderly man was not enough,

save, perhaps among the Jewish Assemblies (see 1 Peter 5: 2-5). He was put in the official position of the eldership by an apostle, or an apostolic delegate, such as Timothy or Titus, and in that position he was certainly "ordained" as an elder. In Philippi, where everything was in beautiful order, the apostle says in his address to that company, "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). Everything was in order then, and what was the office of a bishop or overseer — *episkopos*? To overlook or have oversight. There were many necessary qualifications, but they were very simple. They must be blameless, "the husband of one wife." Polygamy was common then — Paul says, he must have but one wife. For an elder to have more dependent upon him, as might easily have been the case with many converted from heathenism, would be an occasion of scandal. He was to be "vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker." It seems strange now that such injunctions should be necessary, but the Assembly had only been lately formed, and these people were brought out from heathendom, where all sorts of abominations went on. He was to be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (ver. 4). If his own house were not in order, he was not fit to rule in God's house. Again, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (ver. 6). One young in the truth might get puffed up with the position and place.

"Moreover he must have a good report of *them which are without*; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (ver. 7). Some people say, You must not listen to what the world says. God bids us do so. It is a totally false principle to assert the contrary. God's Assembly is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and the man that is going to fill an official position in it must have a good report of them that are without. The world reads us up and down as clearly as possible, and in the long run they have a very fair judgment — whether we are honest, straightforward Christians, or whether there is chicanery in our history. God says, Have a good report. If a man were not careful in his walk, Satan would be able to trip him up, and the world would know of it most likely. If a man gets a position in the Church of God, Satan will more than ever seek to trip him up, and there will be dishonour to the Lord. We must all walk warily. Further on in the epistle we hear again of the bishops. "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). There were some who had a gift from Christ, as well as their office from the apostle, and they were to be especially esteemed. Eldership in a city did not make them ministers of the Word necessarily, but if they were gifted of the Lord to "labour in word and doctrine," so much the better. Their position as elders did not, however, qualify them for ministry, either locally or abroad. But it must be borne in mind that eldership *per se* was purely a local office. Their gift from Christ was good for everywhere, hence the order to care for them in temporal things. "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (chap. 5: 18). If they were devoted to the Lord's work entirely, they were to be taken care of. If they had given themselves to the work of the Lord in this way, moving in and out among the saints, with that lovely ministry that was of a pastoral character, they were to be looked after. This agrees with similar instructions regarding servants: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6: 6). "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" (1 Cor. 9: 11)

But now the important question arises: How were the elders appointed? Turn to Acts 14: "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" (ver. 23). There you have the distinct statement as to how the elders were *appointed*. We have no intimation from Scripture that the Church was competent to choose them; they might choose their deacons (see Acts 6: 3), but as to elders, it was an apostle, or an apostolic delegate who alone could select them, so far as Scripture teaches, and *they* only ordained them. The Assembly did not then choose the elders — that seems manifest.

We get a little further light on this subject in 1 Timothy 5: 19: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." "*Lay hands* suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (ver. 22). Were they ordained by the laying on of hands? Scripture does not say so. Timothy was instructed to be very careful whom he identified himself with, and the injunction, "lay hands suddenly on no man," may, by implication, carry the thought that thus he ordained elders, but the omission of any statement to this effect is very important, hence you could not say they were appointed by the laying on of hands. They were appointed by the apostles, or by Timothy, or Titus. Of the latter 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 ordered thee" (see R.V., Titus 1: 5). Manifestly Titus had the duty committed to him of appointing elders. It is important, however, to see this, that nowhere in Scripture is there any thought of appointing elders, *save* by *apostles*, or *apostolic delegates*. The Apostolic Church had not the power of so doing so far as God informs us.

May we not then appoint elders today? If you are Paul, or Timothy, or Titus. The Church did not then do it, nor has the power been transmitted, so far as any teaching in Scripture reveals. It is quite true that the custom obtains today, but without the warrant of Scripture, or the necessary authority from God; hence, though men may do it, for reasons I will presently give, the appointments partake rather of the nature of assumption — it not being God's mind at all.

Let us now look again at 1 Timothy 3, where we read of deacons: "Likewise must the deacons 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" (vers. 8-10). They were to be men of experience, and gravity; in whom the saints could have confidence. "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things" (ver. 11). It is very remarkable that the deacon's wife has *her* character indicated. There is not a word about the elder's wife, except that he must have only one. You cannot commit the money of the Assembly to a man who has not a wife of this character, because a deacon's office took him to the homes of the saints, in dealing with cases of temporal need, and in many instances a woman's tender touch would be much better than a man's, and thus a woman's ministry would come in in a lovely way. Further, if she were not wise, she might talk of what came before them in dealing with the circumstances of the Lord's people, and it might be passed on to others, and slander be the result. It is thus easy to see why a deacon must have a wife who could be a helpmeet to him in the work of the Lord.

"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For 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," is the next statement (vers. 12, 13). I think these two things, the "good degree" and "great boldness," are interesting, and you find each of them beautifully illustrated in Acts, first in the case of Stephen, and secondly in Philip. Turn to Acts 6 where we read: "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 ministration" (ver. 1). The Grecians were those Jews who had been born, or lived among the Greeks, and spoke their language, but still retained Jewish thoughts and worship, and now they were converted. Things in God's Assembly then were very lovely — they had but one purse; but these Grecians thought their widows were being neglected. "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" (vers. 2, 3). These the Assembly might choose. That was quite right, because the saints had put their money into the Lord's treasury. It was no longer theirs when it was given — it was the Lord's; and now some of the Lord's servants are to be chosen to deal with the disposition of the money, who would have the confidence of the saints in doing so, and thus they have a voice in their appointment. "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 Times, 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*" (vers. 5, 6). There we again undoubtedly get ordination. The seven were put in this official position of deacons, though the word is not used of them here. It is also quite clear as to *how* they were ordained — the apostles only did it. The Assembly might *choose* them, but the apostles *ordained* them; as to elders, apparently the apostles both *chose* and *ordained* them.

And who were the seven men chosen? We should have thought a fair way of electing them would be to choose four Jews and three Grecians, or three Jews and four Grecians. Do you know what grace did that day? The Assembly, composed so largely of Jews, chose seven Grecians, as we know by their names. That is the way in which grace triumphs, for it was a lovely high tide of grace that day. It was as if they said, Dear brethren, if you cannot trust us, we can trust you — we will choose seven of the class that have been aggrieved. What a lesson for us all!

In Acts 7, Stephen, in the exercise of a spiritual gift which the Lord conferred on him, gave that wonderful address, and sealed his testimony with his blood. He had used his diaconate well, and purchased to himself "great boldness in the faith." Anything grander and bolder than Stephen that day I defy you to find in Scripture.

Philip purchased his "good degree" also in Jerusalem at that time. When Stephen passed off the scene, great persecution broke out, the Assembly was broken up, and in Acts 8 we find Philip going down to Samaria, and carrying on a wonderful work in that city. In virtue of what? His diaconal ordainment? Clearly not. He had no longer anything to do with tables, but with a risen Christ in glory, and he had the privilege of exercising a gift which the Lord had given to him, and ministering what he had learned of Christ to the Samaritans. From that service he obtained from God the epithet, the title of "Philip the evangelist." In Acts 21, "Luke, the beloved physician," says, that when the apostle Paul passed through Caesarea, many years after, he "entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him

... and we tarried there many days" (vers. 8, 10). How good to see the great apostle of the Gentiles staying with dear simple Philip the evangelist. That is how the Lord's various gifts were mixed up in practical life in that day — the great apostle and the earnest evangelist were together; they were not rivals, but co-workers, as the Lord ordained, and got on well together.

You might ask me, What authority then have we for appointing elders today? You have none, and for two reasons; because you have not *the* Church over which they were appointed, as in apostolic days, and you have not the *competent* ordaining power. First, it is manifest that you have not the apostles, or apostolic delegates; and secondly, where is the Assembly, say in this city, over which you would appoint elders or deacons? I could not go three hundred yards from here without finding men who would tell me they were elders. Of *the* Church of God in Edinburgh? No, but elders of, shall I say rival churches which have no connection — perhaps are at war — with each other? Such, if faithful to their office, tend to keep the sheep apart. The perpetuation of the office that God let drop has had a deleterious effect upon the saints of God today. He forbore to perpetuate appointments that had to do with the order of the Assembly, because by the apostles He had to announce to us the break-up of that order — a break-up that had even begun before their withdrawal from the scene. It is folly of men to ape the power they do not possess, and to make appointments which only point out and perpetuate division, instead of maintaining unity, which was clearly their office at the outset, when the Assembly was one.

It is important to see that all that the Church really needs Christ will give. Further, I have no doubt that in any Assembly truly gathered to the Lord's name, upon the divine ground of the unity of the body of Christ, when saints are found together in any number, there will be men raised up of the Lord to do the work of elders, without assuming the place or position. The work will be done, and the saints will find blessing in submitting themselves to such, without any claim of formal appointment. Reality is always better than empty form.

What has been advanced regarding elders holds equally good as regards the formal appointment of deacons.

Outwardly the Church is in ruin, as the later epistles all unfold to us prophetically. That already was manifest, even when the apostles wrote, but in those epistles there is provision for faith, and inspired instruction there provided for us in the day of evil, and if we are only simple before God, confident in Christ the Head, and have faith in the presence, sufficiency, leading, and guiding of the Spirit of God, there is as much blessing for the saints of God today as in any day. In Israel's day the deeper the darkness the brighter the grace of God shone out. Hezekiah's feast was better than Solomon's (see 2 Chr. 30: 26); Josiah's was better than Hezekiah's — there had been none like it since Samuel's day (see 2 Chr. 35: 18); and as for Nehemiah's, there had been none like it since the time of Joshua (see Neh. 8: 17). There is blessing today for the saints of God as great as ever, if only they be obedient to His Word. We only want confidence in the Lord, faith in His love, and subjection to His Spirit.