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**DISCOURSE**

ON THE

**OFFICIAL RELATIONS**

OF

**NEW TESTAMENT ELDERS.**

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Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.—1 Thess. v. 21..

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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The substance of the following discourse was delivered in the Tammany street church, on the 19th ult. as a service preparatory to the ordination of four elders, who were, there and then, ordained according to the principles therein exhibited. Having been revised and enlarged, it is now given to the public at the request of the elders of that church.

Judging from the experience which I have had under similar circumstances, it may be presumed, that this discourse will call forth considerable criticism. If so, I have but one favour to solicit; which is this:—that those who may feel themselves called upon to sit in judgment upon my opinions, would expose any errors in principle which they may detect, and establish any positions they may assume, by fair scriptural proof. I shall then hold myself indebted to them,—as I shall to any man who may help me to understand my Bible better than I do,—and feel no shame whatever in changing my opinions, when convinced they are wrong. If they act differently, they may wound my feelings, but can neither affect my judgment, nor alter my course.

BALT. *March* 10, 1826.

## DISCOURSE.

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TITUS, ch. 1. v. 5.

*“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest—ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.*

THE christian never does any thing more difficult to his own conscience, nor more uncomely in the eyes of others, than when he undertakes to deny what he knows has been expressly revealed in the scriptures. “Thus saith the Lord,” is a law both in heaven and on earth; and it should exert a more powerful influence over none, than the spirit of him who has been cleansed and redeemed by Jesus’ blood.—Indeed the presumption is, that every man in the church, of every clime, of every age, of every rank, would eagerly, continually, and prayerfully inquire after what God has said; and especially that *we* would “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard” in “these last days,” when Jehovah “has spoken unto us by his Son.”

It is, notwithstanding, a lamentable fact, that this very matter has created strife in the sanctuary of grace; and that, at this late hour, after eighteen centuries have nearly rolled by since the canon of scripture has been closed, and when divine providence appears to be hastening human things to their crisis, the place which the word of God is calculated to occupy, is not clearly defined:—no, not even by the ministry themselves, whose commission is based on a “thus saith the Lord.” So much is this the case, that in approaching the

consideration of a scriptural subject, like that which our present text and the present occasion call upon us to investigate, there is considerable hazard in making a simple reference to the Bible, or in venturing either to disregard, or not to comply with, sectarian law. But surely, brethren, the Bible will not lead us astray, neither may we be afraid to make it the man of our counsel, and our constant companion. Rather let our unanimous voice be,—“to the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” If you will join me in this, and agree honestly and prayerfully to seek after biblical truth, hazardous as it may be, I will endeavour to give you what I find in the scriptures on our present subject, so far as circumstances may demand the disclosure. At the same time, while I have no desire to entertain you with novelties, nor to distract you with any arbitrary innovations of my own, you must not be surprised to hear the validity of some human customs seriously questioned, or the inconsistency between divine law and some sectarian principles or ecclesiastical forms plainly exposed.

The subject of *church government*, very few undertake to examine. Many christians think it an unimportant, if not an indifferent, matter. Others are appalled by the variety of opinions which have been broached, which have been zealously and pertinaciously maintained, and in behalf of each of which so long a list of learned, venerable, and reverend names can be so easily furnished. And perhaps not a few may have very carelessly and indolently supposed, that no precise or intelligible scriptural legislation has been communicated about it. Nor may we wonder that such impressions have been cherished. The warm contests which have been produced by episcopalian, presbyterian, and independent combatants, sometimes sustained by the deadly hate of political partisans, or the strong arm of civil power, and at other times allied

to conflicting opinions on the general subjects of religion, sufficiently account for such impressions. Or if this be not enough, then the prurient curiosity, and the astonishing diligence with which the pages of the fathers have been searched,—fathers, many of whom lived in an age of “wide-spreading degeneracy,” who would scarcely have been remembered, and seldom named, had they not been considered as noble witnesses in this controversy,—would make up the deficiency. O, when shall this strife cease? When shall christianity enthrone the lord of conscience on the human heart, and gloriously achieve the freedom of *the human mind*?

But after all, why should we be careless about this matter? What doctrine of the Bible has not been involved in the same difficulty, and enveloped in the same clouds?—All that belongs to the attributes of Godhead, the characteristics of his moral government, the powers of man, and the final issue when Jesus Christ shall surrender up the kingdom to his Father, have been handled with equal irreverence, and presented in sectarian forms equally misshapen. And if we should suffer our impressions to extend as far as this polemical chivalry has carried the sons of the church, we must cease to be christians altogether. Every christian grace we have would dwindle into a fragment of human policy; our assurances for heaven would become petty intellectual conceits; and our hopes must perish in that fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.

Let us not part with our religion so easily; nor pusillanimously shrink from an inquiry, which, it may be found, we are all qualified to make. Church government may not be so embarrassing a subject as we suspect; but when stripped of human legislation, it may be seen to be characterized by a beautiful simplicity. Every man feels an inquiry into the principles of political government to be important; every day is issuing, from every city, town, and

village, her numberless chronicles as the vehicles of political information; and why should not liberty, in *all* its branches, stir up the human heart with her intensest feelings, and the human mind with her noblest powers?— Surely God has not made his government of *love* so difficult of access; nor our social duties, the result of *reciprocal love*, so hard to be understood. There may be difficulty, it is true; but then it proceeds from ideas which we ourselves have created: it lies in prejudices which we have not magnanimity or strength enough to surrender; while our ingenuity is most painfully exercised in an attempt to coerce the scriptures into a conformity with our own “immature” speculations.

I presume that the necessity for any government at all in the church, as sustained by human instrumentality, grows out of our moral infirmities. Government is, or ought to be, a mere social scheme to secure general benefit, and results from the fact that man has been created a social being. It is therefore designed as a prudent arrangement of our necessary dependence on each other, and should be framed in such a manner as to unite the greatest amount of individual effort with a corresponding amount of social good. On the one hand individual character should be carefully regarded, and on the other the general welfare should be anxiously protected. According as one or the other may be slighted, anarchy or despotism must ensue; to neither of which will the great I AM impart the seal of his Holy Spirit. As in the state men are distinguished by various talents, so in the church they possess various gifts: and in neither relation are any of their faculties useless; but they must all act in harmony and seek the common weal, as accountable to the great Governor of the whole for any ability to do good, which he may have committed to their trust. To effect this,—to guard against hurtful collision, and to preserve due order

and decorum while so many varieties are to be intermingled in our social transactions,—to effect this, I say, in the simplest and best form, in our religious associations, is the great end of church government. God has not created offices in his house, to afford to one man an opportunity to grow more important than another man; but to furnish every one with an occasion of doing all the good he can: and each minister, instead of growing supercilious because of his official distinction, might say with Moses, “would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them.” *The good of the whole* then is the benevolent object which Jehovah has proposed;—personal importance is the invention of human pride,—a sophism which calls ambition *philanthropy*. Church officers are forbidden to be lords over God’s heritage, and have been expressly warned not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think; but to think soberly, “*according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*” Considerations like these would induce us to suppose, that we ought to have in the church as little government as possible; and that we should seek for a reformation which would be achieved by a little more *love*, and a little less *rule*.

Refraining from any further general remarks, excepting so far as the discussion of our present subjects may require as we shall proceed, let us now turn to the immediate consideration of those subjects. Our first inquiry is into

#### THE OFFICE AND DUTIES OF AN ELDER?

This same apostle tells us in another of his epistles, that when our Lord ascended up on high, like a mighty conqueror leading captivity captive, he gave gifts unto men: i. e. as he himself explains,—“he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the minis-

try, for the edifying of the body of Christ." At the time when Matthias was chosen to occupy the place of Judas, the eleven state the qualification of an *apostle* in the following language;—"of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." Their proceedings afterwards further reveal, that an apostle must be chosen by the Lord himself;\* and they assign as the reason for their using any instrumentality at all about this matter, that the spirit of prophecy had declared that the "bishoprick" of Judas should be given to another. We must then leave them on their thrones, in the enjoyment of unenvied glory, as those who had followed the Redeemer "in the regeneration." No prophet nor evangelist, nor teacher, in their own days, claimed their titles, nor sought to defraud them of their honours; while Paul, brought in afterwards by an express provision made by the Lord himself, *magnified his office*.

*Prophets* in like manner were introduced into the church, according to the master's good pleasure. Their official attribute consisted in this, that they possessed the spirit of prophecy, and were thus qualified to utter some immediate revelation they had received, or to foretell some future event that was made known to them. If men should now appear, evidently distinguished by like official attributes, we should be under an obligation to yield to them their place in the church even in the present day.—But church courts can no more make prophets, than they can make apostles.

*Evangelists* were men who laboured in word and doctrine. They appear, however, to have been created for a particular occasion: i. e. in the introduction of the new dispensation, churches were to be planted where no preachers were to be

\*Acts. ch. 1, v. 20—26.



found, and the gospel was to be preached to sinners who had no pastors nor teachers. The apostles were sent every where, and finding, as Moses had done before them, the labours of their office too heavy for them, they selected some others as their companions, who might be "profitable" to them in their peculiar "ministry." They were men, in all probability, of talent, of enterprize, of popular address, whose feelings and circumstances qualified them to meet an emergency. They could consent to be detached from any local associations; and having imbibed, what in modern times we would call a missionary spirit, they could labour in any community where labour was wanted. And if in this city, or in the adjacent country, like difficulties existed, a similar officer might now be ordained by "the laying on of the hands of the presbytery," and sent out to minister in a like manner. Or, if there be any thing particularly imposing in the title itself, a presbyter or elder, might be so ordained, to render any special service of this kind. All that can be wanted would be, a sphere of action, and an individual qualified to fill it. Why not? It belongs to the church to instruct the world, where God has placed her as a burning and a shining light; and surely we may not justify any ecclesiastical legislation which would put her light under a bushel.

*Pastors and teachers* we may very readily conceive to be the officers of a particular church, because such officers every particular church needs; and because, while it is required in our text that elders shall be ordained in every city, their official duties are frequently stated in the scriptures to be precisely those which are pastoral in their nature. With these, on the present occasion, we are chiefly concerned; as, having chosen a number of elders to serve in this church, you have set them before your executive officers to be ordained. We then inquire after the character of their office, and the extent of their duties.

Frequent reference is made both in the old and the new testaments to the elders of the Jews; from whose ecclesiastical constitution both the title and the office appear to have been derived, and thence transferred to the new dispensation. God had consecrated the family of Aaron and the tribe of Levi for official service under the mosaic economy. But then they were priests, and their concern was with the temple and the altar. The temple was at Jerusalem; there sacrifices were offered, and the whole ritual was presented in full and distinct form. But all the Jews did not live in Jerusalem, neither were sacrifices the only acts of religious worship they were required to render. They had social ordinances of a much more limited character, and suited to the circumstances of their local situation. In addition to the temple, synagogues were erected throughout Judea;—they were to be found in every town and village, or wherever a regular assembly of convenient size could be collected. In these synagogues prayer and praise were offered up, and the scriptures were read and expounded,—religious services, which, you know, characterize the worship of believers in the new testament church.

In the synagogue, as we are informed by those who have made jewish antiquities their study, there were a bishop, a bench of elders, and deacons. The bishop was a presbyter, or elder, and his official duty appears to have called upon him to take the lead in the services of the synagogue;—to offer up public prayer, and to expound the scriptures. He also sat in council with the other presbyters or elders, and along with them exercised whatever authority was necessary to maintain the due order and decorum of the synagogue.

From these things, as has already been remarked, it would seem that the organization of the new testament church was derived from this simple form of ecclesiastical administration existing in the jewish synagogue. In consistency with

this, Paul directs Titus to ordain elders *in every city*, without making the smallest allusion to any superior grade of officers; thus rendering it evident that elders are perfectly competent to manage the spiritual concerns of the church. And he himself, we are told in the history of his apostolic labours,\* associated with Barnabas, ordained elders *in every church*. Hence also, when from Miletus he sent to Ephesus for the elders, he gave them a solemn exhortation, sufficiently indicating, that the affairs of the church had been committed to their hands as a spiritual charge.† Peter in like manner, addressing the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, especially exhorted the elders, as having the spiritual charge in all those places, to “feed the flock of God, to take the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” and then, as though elders had the rule entrusted to them until Christ’s second coming, he adds,—“and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” And James, addressing *the twelve tribes as scattered abroad*, directs them, that if any were sick, they should send for the elders of the church, who should esteem it to be their official work to pray over them. This might seem general enough, as it includes all those who could be brought out from among the Jews, and inserts them in their own proper place, and under proper ecclesiastical government, in the new testament dispensation. If we desired any thing more general, we have merely to refer to our text, and to ask you to attend to its terms: “ordain elders,” says the apostle, “in *every city*.” No legislative enactment could be more distinct.

Perhaps it may here be worthy of remark, that there is no single individual alluded to as selected, and advanced above

\*Acts, xiv. 23. †Acts, xx. 17—end.

all around him in the community where he presides. Neither Paul, nor Peter, nor James, speak to us of some privileged being, exalted above others who are his equals in gifts, and in the affections of the church where he is placed.— They all speak of a plurality of elders, whether they refer to every city, or to every church; and seem, as distinctly as the nature of the argument, restricted or fashioned by the circumstances of the times, would admit, to predicate the prosperity of the church, not on despotic rule, but upon division of labour. This corresponds with the nature of society, and is most strikingly analogous to the political notions which are familiar to every American citizen, and which are, the world throughout, breaking down the clumsy fabrics of ages past.

Now can you conceive of any thing more simple than this? What can be more simple than that a few men, approved for their intelligence, beloved for their virtues, and confided in for their integrity, should, by the consent and election of the people, devote their intelligence, virtues, and integrity to the common weal? Compared with this, what are synodical decrees or prelatical vestments? What are cold statutes which freeze inquiry, or pompous ceremonies which cheat the human intellect out of something substantial and good? What are church officers, and church courts, continually embarrassed by the etiquette of their own official relations; or learned preachers, coming in, not under the real, but the supposed, circumstances of society, and erected, by an arbitrary distinction, into a *class* or *order*;— a measure, which, were it not that an overruling providence curtails the operations of our errors, would make them strangers to the sympathies of human society.

Perhaps it may now be asked in what light the *preacher* is to be viewed? I reply, as an elder unquestionably. All the presbyterian churches will cheerfully accede to this:

and, what is far better than their unanimous judgment, the scriptures\* call the men who labour in word and doctrine,—elders. Nor have any of them any necessity to aspire after something higher than this humble title. It is but a piece of pure vain-glory to covet envious distinctions, and to love greetings in the markets,—to be called of men, Rabbi, Reverend, Doctor, &c. Indeed, as a matter of personal importance, instead of asserting some official distinction for the sake of a practical benefit, they might very cheerfully forego the humble title of *elder* itself. Our proper designation in the church of God is, *brother*, as the Redeemer has said, *all ye are brethren*. The apostle Peter was not ashamed to call himself an elder, and the apostle John so styles himself again and again, when speaking of their official relations.

But still, it may be asked, is there no distinction? Certainly. The preacher is the elder, who labours in word and doctrine. This is his special work, which he ought not to neglect for any earthly consideration; but which he may neglect for a thousand reasons;—reasons which betray his own morbid sensibilities, the inconsiderate habits of religious society, the uncourteous or thoughtless legislation of his brethren, or his own loneliness as an efficient church officer. Timothy was a young man who was entitled to the good opinion of every one who knew him. He seems also to have been blessed with some of the peculiar gifts of the Holy Spirit in that peculiar age. And yet Paul exhorts him, to “give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to prayer; not to *neglect* the gift that was in him; to meditate on divine things entrusted to his care; to give himself *wholly* to these things; and to do it in such a manner that his profiting might appear unto all.” And if Paul gave such admonitions to Timothy, it is to be supposed that

\* 1 Tim. v. 17.

he complied with them himself, so far as a man, who had upon him "the care of all the churches," possibly could secrete himself for private meditation, or general research. This last remark must be sustained by our own knowledge of the general operations of the human mind, or by our ideas of the character of the apostle's individual mind.

In further remarking upon the duties of a preacher, it may not be improper to state, that the exposition of scriptural principle, and the application of that principle to the common concerns of religious life, form no secondary task. These things call for much thinking, much observation, and much prayer. He who attends to them faithfully, will have but little strength, or little time, to devote to any thing else,—particularly in a philosophical or controversial age. And must he then continually run the round of sectarian law? Would merchants be pleased with a commercial policy which disregards commercial facts? Would politicians be satisfied with hackneyed phrases, or questionable maxims? And will clerical men not submit their professional engagements to a transforming power, which the circumstances of the age may exert?—Brethren, it is a very possible thing to reduce this whole subject of preaching to a very low standard. A few topics may become popular, and they will be called the *gospel*; while christians are doomed to hear, from sabbath to sabbath, and from one year's end to the other, the same trite, or common-place, remarks, and may receive, after all, but a moiety of scriptural truth.

Now, you know that congregations ask their preachers to do a very great deal. They must preach twice or thrice on the sabbath, and, perhaps, two or three times in the week; they must visit the sick; bury the dead; attend to ecclesiastical calls beyond the immediate demands of their own congregations; bow to all the civilities of literary

society; sustain domestic claims, which are not at all enfeebled by the common proverb concerning Eli's sons; and submit to every intrusion which the public at large shall conclude their supposed influence may warrant. Can human beings accomplish all this? Are flesh and blood equal to the task? Must not the preacher neglect the pulpit in order to answer these various calls? Millions upon millions, beloved brethren, would not purchase the strength which this multiform service requires; and when you ask a minister to fulfil such varied demands, you bid him not to preach at all, or to reduce his conscience to the mistaken notions of religious society, and to serve you much more feebly and sluggishly than he ought.

Under all these views, it appears to me, that, while the preacher is taken from among the elders to expound the scriptures and conduct the public services of the sanctuary, they in their places are called to discharge whatever belongs to parochial visitation. To organize the church on a plan embracing such a provision, would, I readily admit, produce a very great change in her external form; nor would the change be less striking, or less interesting, in her spiritual circumstances. For such a reform, however, society in general is very far from being prepared. Its principles are not apprehended, and long established habits have wedded the feelings and affections of christians to other arrangements. Yet it may not be improper to urge it upon your most serious and affectionate consideration; and perhaps it is no vain hope, that the transactions of this day may afford the most favourable opportunity of introducing so happy a change into this church; in which case the practical results will speak for themselves. But here it may be necessary for me to state, that I am not seeking a retreat for myself, nor expressing any intention to decline my usual parochial services. I have done as much in visiting

the sick and "supporting the weak," as my circumstances would allow, and still intend, according to my ability, and in consistency with faithfulness to my more immediate trust, so to labour for your spiritual edification. My heart never has been, and it never can be, a stranger to those sympathies, which either your temporal or spiritual condition should excite in the bosom of the man, in whom you have confided so much. Yet whatever I may do, or may not do, your elders are called upon, by the Word of God, to exhort, to comfort, to reprove, to warn, to pray, among you, as opportunities may occur, or your situation may demand.

The principle thus advanced, may be very easily confirmed by reference to the sacred page.—Paul, in his exhortation to the elders of Ephesus, addresses, not a single elder, but a number. And he admonishes them as having a spiritual charge entrusted to them in common. Take heed, he says, to yourselves: take heed to *all* the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, or *bishops*; take heed to feed the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood. "For I know, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock; also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. *I have shewed you all things*, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak." Peter, in like manner, addresses, not an elder, but the elders; and he requires them to feed the flock of God, and cheerfully to take the oversight thereof. It is abundantly manifest, from these quotations, that the church is committed to the eldership as a spiritual trust, for which they must give account: and that if one, or more, is selected from their



own number to expound the scriptures, yet that does not release them from their corresponding responsibilities, nor substitute, in their case, a dignified retirement for active usefulness. Feeding the flock of God calls for much more than mere sanctuary services; and oversight is much more than mere preaching. Terms like these express full provision for the spiritual necessities of the church, that she may be edified, enlarged, sustained, refreshed. They include all that belongs to exhortation, prayer, watchfulness, consolation, warning, reproof, rule, &c. The elders must do all this, each one labouring in his own place, and according to his own ability; or, as the scriptures speak, some elders must preside well, and others must labour in word and doctrine. All are not intended to do the same thing, but a plurality exists to meet various wants. No one man is adequate to sustain any spiritual community: Moses flagged; Paul sought a companion; and the master has not now left his ministry to falter under a distressing loneliness; but he has associated a brother with him in his labour of love;—and that brother is a spiritual officer, not a lay-elder,—a fellow labourer, not an unfeeling and unsympathising ruler.

The elders already in office in this church, and those to be inducted this morning into office, agree in these general principles. I do not pledge them for every word, for every sentence, nor for every idea, here advanced. I would not treat any man in that way, neither would I suffer any man to treat me in this creed-making manner;—but I am warranted to assert a coincidence of view on general principles. They consider themselves to be invested with spiritual functions, and called to render spiritual services. They may exhort you to duty; they may comfort you by unfolding the merits of our beloved Redeemer, and the precious promises of our covenant God; they may warn

you of the fearful consequences of sin; they may pray with and for you; they may sustain a spiritual parentage to your children;—in a thousand ways they may be helpers of your joy, and companions in your sorrows. And all this may be done from the purest, the kindest, and the most magnanimous motives, and with an assiduity which cannot fail to be a blessing.

Now then, brethren, *your* duty is 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 again, I say, “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.” It will be yours to receive them affectionately when they call upon you; to send for them when you are sick; to ask counsel of them when you need it; to converse freely with them of things divine; to listen in patience and love to their brotherly admonition; to bear them habitually on your hearts to the mercy-seat; and to afford them every facility in the discharge of their duties. What a glorious spiritual alliance is here! What a mingling of christian hearts! How well adapted the opportunity to a fine display of the social attributes of moral character! What tender sympathies, most happily elicited! These things never can be forgotten. Their memorials pass with us into eternity,—they are associated with all the recollections of redeemed spirits under the altar of heaven—they shall be revived in the most interesting form on the resurrection morning,—our new name, our celestial thrones shall be their splendid and imperishable symbols.—O, that the time may not be far distant, when the eldership throughout the whole church shall be constructed on these benign and lofty principles; and when political government

in the church shall yield to spiritual effort! O, that this may be the commencement of a new era in this church, and may God pour down upon all her members and all her elders the healthful spirit of his grace!

A second question now presents itself to our view—

#### HOW ARE ELDERS TO BE ORDAINED?

This question, it is presumed, may excite not a little curiosity, particularly as it is to be discussed in this church. For, since I have ventured to tell to the world, that it is my decided and unequivocal opinion, that the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice, and that God is the only Lord of conscience, I have been frequently asked, by old men and young men, by clergymen and lay-men, how elders or ministers can possibly be ordained? Or whether the abandonment of the old confession of faith, will not devolve upon the heretical theologian the necessity of making a new one? In some respects, this question is not unlike another which has often been proposed,—by what name shall we now call ourselves, when our ecclesiastical connexions have been so rudely sundered? To which we would briefly reply, lifting up our eyes and hearts to the heavens,—“Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.—Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not.”—But in other respects, ordination to ecclesiastical office deserves our most serious attention.

The general principles, which are to be secured and recognized in an ordination ceremony, it appears to me, are few and simple. They are, to my apprehension, the following:

1. When a christian acts under official responsibilities in Christ's kingdom, his business is to obey the laws of his prince.—This, it might readily be supposed, is a self-evi-

dent truth; unless some one can show that church officers are a co-ordinate branch of legislators with Prince Immanuel. I then demur on the question of loyalty, being perfectly willing to fall into the hands of the master who loved me unto the death; but as to man, his tender mercies are cruel.

2. When a christian receives an official trust, he means conscientiously and faithfully to do his duty, agreeably to his best apprehensions, and according to his ability. This, it might be presumed, is equally clear, unless unfaithfulness is a virtue.

3. When there are a plurality of officers, having a common trust, and consequently associated in common services, they should live together in *love*, and act in harmony, so as to promote the common good. About this there can be no dispute, unless to be quarrelsome is to be virtuous; and a precept requiring us to "contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints," be understood as a *carte-blanche* to polemics to cover all manner of strife, and to convert their christian graces into burnished weapons for carnal warfare.

Are not these moral maxims, as clear as any mathematical axioms? Can any one answer, no? Then what shall I say to a man, who, walking under a noon-day beam, with his eyes open, and his vision clear, tells me the sun does not shine, and calls himself a philosopher? After pledges, tacitly or formally given, which embrace these elements of official life, what more can you have? Must you not necessarily trust to men's qualifications and integrity, and refer yourself to the master's providential oversight? Do you expect, by a multitude of vows, or a covenant long and minute, to frame a substitute for grace in the heart, or thereby to *infuse* grace into the heart? Would the great Immanuel, as the heir over all things, receive into his confidence a man who proclaimed himself a rebel against his laws at the outset? Would men trust an individual who had no intention

to be honest? Would any one take to his embrace an Ishmaelite, whose hand is against every man; or choose hatred and strife, rather than harmony and love?—But then all this is my creed, it may be said. Certainly it is; for I believe it all; and I suppose it must be the creed of every man, whose conceptions have ranged beyond the nursery, or whose intellect has out-grown the years of infancy. In like manner I believe that the sun shines by day, and that his effulgence is withdrawn by night;—Moreover, I believe, that all the powers upon earth cannot mantle his beams during the meridian hour, nor recall them to illumine the midnight watch; neither can they prescribe to the human mind, faith or unbelief in such self-evident truths. And that which we want, is simply divine truth in its own native lustre, and in its own beautiful and fascinating arrangements; we wish to have it unclouded by the sophisms of the schools; undeformed by party strife; and detached from the peculiarities of our fathers, who were as prone to go astray as we can be. That which we want is the Bible, conceded, felt, and employed, as a competent instrument of divine operation on human hearts;—committed, on the one hand, to the best use which the human mind can make of it; and on the other, to the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, who, commissioned to take of the things which are Christ's, and to show them unto us, may shed his own divine radiance over its sacred page, and "let in" upon our blinded minds the light of redeeming love.

Still, however, the question returns upon us, in what form shall elders be ordained?—We are not desirous of introducing novelties for the sake of appearing singular; and yet the ordination ceremony, as it shall be conducted this day, may be a very great novelty among presbyterians in general, and perhaps altogether unanticipated by you. But we are desirous to fulfil what the scriptures enjoin; and can-

not think that any human custom forms a conclusive argument against a scriptural principle, a scriptural statute, or a scriptural precedent.

In describing and defending the form of ordination, on which the elders of this church have determined, the body of the following argument shall be taken from the scriptures themselves; though in commencing and finishing the reasonings, to which your attention is now solicited, considerations, derived from other sources, may be briefly stated.

We have already had occasion to remark, that the new testament eldership appears to have been a transcript of the old testament eldership: i. e. that the apostles, in organizing the new economy, instead of going to the temple for models, where all was *typical*, turned to the synagogue, whose institutions were moral or spiritual, and derived their constitutional principles thence. If so, then it may be no unimportant matter to ascertain how the old testament elder was ordained? On the authority of those who have studied jewish antiquities, and who have made not a little use of their researches in sustaining the presbyterian cause, I state, that the old testament elder was ordained by the imposition of hands; and that those who laid their hands upon his head, when so ordained, were a plurality of elders already in office. If then our view is correct, that the new testament eldership is a transcript of the old, surely, unless there has been some special precept forbidding it, it follows, that the elders, already in office in the church, are required to ordain those who are set before us by the imposition of hands. If the premises are correct, the conclusion is irresistible.—An ancient custom may not always be out of place in a theological argument; and they who are prone to make up the materials of their controversial reasonings out of the writings and opinions of the fathers, will respectfully listen to such an appeal.

Whatever may be the value of the foregoing argument, our instructions, on the present occasion, must be derived from the scriptures. In commencing this inquiry, however, we must remark, that they have not said much on the subject; and that we, in arranging an ecclesiastical sect, or framing a voluntary association, are reduced to the necessity of making laws for ourselves. The scriptures have rather embodied what it was thought necessary to say in a recital of facts, than in any distinct or positive precepts; for they seem much more concerned to make us christians, than to make us governors. "He that desireth the office of a bishop," says Paul, "desireth a good work:"—he is not coveting official honours, but wants employment;—he seeks to be useful;—his love for Jesus and the souls of men leads him to action;—his honours and reward are reserved for him in the upper sanctuary.

The first passage to which you are referred, is in the Acts of the Apostles; and is expressed in the following words:—"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Greeks 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, 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. And the word of God increased;

and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”\* The state of the case appears to have been simply this. Christianity began to grow in her influence upon society, the church was much enlarged, and the apostles were unable to meet the increased demand for official labour.—Complaints were soon made of neglect of duty; and as men are always hunting after motives, partialities were suspected. There was some foundation for complaint, for some things were neglected; but the apostles were innocent, for they could not attend to every thing, neither was it “*reason* that they should leave the word of God and serve tables.” To meet the emergency, they proposed that seven men should be chosen, of sufficient qualification and approved integrity, who should be appointed over that particular business; to which proposition the whole multitude readily acceded.—A very plain and simple transaction, which the church, under like necessities, might do again, and defend it, as Peter did, upon the *reasonableness* of the thing itself.

Presbyterians generally suppose, that the apostles ordained these seven men as *deacons*. This opinion has been founded, I presume, upon the facts, that the Jews had deacons in the synagogue, whose business it was to attend to the poor,—so that it was very natural that the apostles should create a corresponding office on the present occasion; that these individuals were appointed to protect the poor from injustice; that an officer, called a *deacon* is recognized in the New Testament; and that in the early ages of christianity, the church did commit this particular business to a class of men so denominated. Let this be conceded for a moment. These deacons were ordained by the imposition of hands; but presbyterians do not now ordain deacons by

\*Acts, ch. vi. 1—7.



the imposition of hands; and can any one assign a good reason why they have abandoned this scriptural precedent? Or, if to-day, instead of ordaining elders, we were called to ordain deacons, by the imposition of hands, would not the scene be equally novel, and create equal suspicion about its correctness?

This conclusion might be admitted to us, that deacons should be ordained by the imposition of hands; and then we might be asked, what has all this to do with the ordination of elders? I reply, that if deacons, whose office is not on the same level with that of the elders, were so ordained, why should not elders be ordained in like form? And the question is asked here, merely to take away any superstitious idea about the solemnity of the ceremony, as though it were above the present occasion.

But it might be doubted whether these individuals were ordained deacons at all. There was a heavy pressure of circumstances, created by the dread of persecution, which might be adduced to show that the whole thing was a pure anomaly, and that more than a few poor widows were to be attended to. They had all things *in common*. As many as were possessors of houses or lands, sold them, and laid down the proceeds at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to *every man* according as he had need. It was over this daily ministration, where no fraud could be practised without lying to the Holy Ghost, that these men were ordained to preside. Then, as the case does not fall within the range of the deacon's office as ordinarily understood, perhaps they were not deacons. What were they? Shall we call them lay-elders? If we may, it will follow that lay-elders should be ordained by the imposition of hands. If they were neither lay-elders, nor deacons, then they were evidently set apart to this particular work; as we would call them in modern language, trustees, or a special committee.

created for a present purpose. Then our argument will turn our attention from their office to their work; in that case we should find it something of a secondary character, which the apostles would not bring into comparison with the higher services involved in preaching the word; and we would have a double inference in our favour—men set apart to serve on a *special occasion* by imposition of hands, and men set apart to serve in an humbler capacity than that of an elder, by the imposition of hands.—The question returns upon us, why should not elders be so ordained?

Again,—Overstepping the *ordinary* office of the eldership for a little, you are referred to the following charges which Paul gave to his son Timothy:—“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, *with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.*”\* “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God that is in thee, by the laying on of my hands.”† Here then is Timothy, a *superior* officer, as he is generally supposed to have been;—an evangelist, or, as some would make him, a diocesan bishop;—ordained by the imposition of hands. But suppose that the idea of the superiority of Timothy’s office be a mere conceit; still we should have a man, whose business it was to labour in word and doctrine, ordained by the imposition of hands. And if he had no superiority of office, then he was a mere elder, detached from a particular church and commissioned to meet changing circumstances;—and so we would have an elder ordained by the imposition of hands.—This varied argument returns the question upon us, with growing interest, why is not the elder ordained by the imposition of hands?

It may be asked, by what presbytery was Timothy ordained? I reply that I do not know. The scriptures have not informed us, and we must be satisfied with the general

\* Tim. iv. 14. † 2 Tim. i. 6.

fact that he was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. We may indeed reason on probabilities; in which case it would be very natural to suppose, that he became the subject of this ceremony when he was first sent out upon ministerial service:—unless the present habit of “licensing,” without ordaining, can be sustained by scriptural law. The account of his missionary call is given in the Acts of the Apostles;\* by attending to which, each inquirer must decide for himself to what presbytery reference is made.

It may further be asked, whether Timóthy was not twice set apart by the imposition of hands to the work of the ministry; or whether Paul laid his hands upon him at the same time the presbytery did? I reply that I do not know. It might have been, or it might not have been, so. We shall presently see that even an apostle submitted to the imposition of hands, when sent out on a particular mission. A like occurrence might have taken place in Timothy’s history, without prejudice to our argument, and without sustaining any claims to prelatical supremacy. But at the same time let it be remarked, that we often hear of the apostles laying their hands on individuals, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:—which thing Paul is recorded to have done, when he met at Ephesus certain disciples, whose instruction he found to be exceedingly limited. Let it further be stated, that when Timothy was called to the ministerial office, Paul was on the spot; having just returned from Jerusalem, where he had been consulting with the apostles and *elders* on the subject of circumcision; and that he selected this amiable young man as his companion at that particular time, in consequence of the warm recommendations given by the brethren. And to conclude this matter, let it not be forgotten that both Peter and John explicitly

\* Ch. xiii. 1—3.

style themselves elders, so that it can require no very great stretch of imagination to suppose, nor is it an improbable conjecture, that Paul laid his hands on Timothy's head as a simple presbyter.

Again. In the church at Antioch, we are informed,\* that there were certain prophets and teachers, who were ministering to the Lord; that during this solemn scene, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them:" and that, "when they had fasted and prayed, and *laid their hands on them*, they sent them away." Now let it be remembered that both Barnabas and Saul were ministers before this ceremony took place, and that they were expressly recognized as such at the very time the call was made. Here then are men set apart to a particular *work* by the imposition of hands, unaffected by any previous ordination to *office* they may have had.—Moreover, Paul was an *apostle*, and his investiture with that high office was wholly independent of any consultation with flesh and blood:—like the priests, called by express designation; like the eleven, commissioned by the Lord himself; or like Matthias, chosen by lot, and by immediate divine direction, on whose head the apostles laid not their hands. Yet, on the present occasion, he was set apart for the purposes of a particular mission by the imposition of hands; and that too by officers of a lower grade; which, according to our modern ideas of the etiquette of office, might seem to be considerably out of the way.—Nevertheless here is the scriptural fact.

Thus we have men ordained to *offices*, both high and low, by the imposition of hands; and we have men, already ordained to office, afterwards set apart to some *particular service* by the imposition of hands. Indeed the ceremony, solemn as it appears, has been appropriated, in scripture

\* Acts, xiii. 1—3.

story, to a variety of objects. So the dying patriarch blessed Joseph's sons; Moses laid his hands on Joshua the son of Nun; and the children of Israel put their hands upon the Levites, when they were offered before the Lord. So the Redeemer laid his hands upon young children, who were brought to him that he might bless them: and promised to his disciples, when he ascended up on high, that those who should believe,—among whom elders, whose business it is to visit the sick, might be very readily included,—should lay hands on the sick that they might recover. In short, the apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews, considers this ceremony of laying on of hands to belong to first principles, with which christians in that day ought to have been familiar.

Once more, and to return to the eldership:—Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, gives some specific direction concerning elders, in which their ordination to office is not overlooked.\* He first prescribes that the elders who rule well should be accounted worthy of double honour, especially those who laboured in word and doctrine. He next cautions him not to receive an accusation against any elder, but at the mouth of two or three witnesses; though, on the other hand, he requires that those who sin should be rebuked before all. He deems the whole a very solemn matter, and seriously charges the evangelist “before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, to observe these things without respect of persons.” Still he admonishes him, in order to prevent, as far as a prudent course of conduct could prevent, a resort to disciplinary measures, not to be hasty in laying hands on any man. This admonition, as the whole nature of the passage evinces, is a prohibition forbidding him suddenly to *ordain* any man an elder: but to make due inquiry concerning his qualifications, his deportment, his social standing, &c. If this be so, then it was the general

\* 1 Tim. v. 17—22.

habit to ordain elders by the imposition of hands; for the apostle, instead of telling the evangelist not to *ordain* any man suddenly, forbids him to *lay hands* suddenly on any man, as though these were synonymous phrases. The sin which he would prevent consisted, not in the imposition of hands, but in ordaining an elder too hastily: provided hands were not imposed hastily, he does not forbid the ceremony itself; while the implied fact that it had been, or the supposition that it might be, done so improperly, is a sufficient argument that this was the common form of ordination.

There is no gratuitous assumption in this argument; for the immediate context requires such an explanation. No other meaning can possibly be attached to the phrase, *lay hands*; and no other officer is alluded to but the elder. This train of reasoning we take to be as conclusive as circumstantial testimony generally is; or as an argument can well be made, which is derived from brief historical allusions, that rest on the established customs of society.

This subject however is connected with another inquiry we have to make, and will be further illustrated by the remarks to which it may lead.

#### WHO POSSESSES THE ORDAINING POWER?

That apostles did ordain men to office, we have full proof: that evangelists did ordain elders, our text abundantly evinces. Whether any one of them did it singly, or unassociated with other apostles, or evangelists, or elders, it does not concern us to inquire. In the opening up of a new dispensation, whose principles would of course be in collision with the religious habits of both jewish and gentile communities, the disciples must have been embarrassed by persecution, or involved in circumstances of necessity, which must provide for themselves. And moreover, let it be remembered, that it is no principle of the divine government,

to sacrifice a substantial moral benefit for any punctilio of form.

On this general subject, or the value of *forms* in certain cases, a passing remark or two, shewing the difference between the divine and human modes of proceeding, may not be out of place. On a certain occasion, when God commanded Moses to bring seventy men of the elders of the people to the door of the tabernacle, that he might put his spirit upon them, and consecrate them as fellow-labourers with this meek and faithful apostle, it seems that two of the seventy,—Eldad and Medad—did not come to the door of the tabernacle, but remained in the camp. Why they acted in this manner, I pretend not to know; but it belongs to an honourable man always to suppose a good motive rather than a bad one:—perhaps they were necessarily detained. This, however, did not prevent the spirit from coming down upon them: they prophesied in the camp where they had remained. Such an occurrence would be thought strange now-a-days; for, judging by the command given to Moses, and the mode employed in the case of the rest, these two men were not *formally* ordained;—there was a flaw in their credentials. In fact, it was thought a strange proceeding then;—even Joshua would have forbidden them to speak, and it required all the prudence, humility, and influence of Moses, to prevent bad consequences from following.

How do we act? Alas! facts report but a melancholy answer. Thousands of our fellow citizens are without the means of grace. Vacancies after vacancies stretch out a gloomy scene before us,—all waiting for young men of talent and learning, which our theological seminaries are supposed adequate to furnish. Year after year rolls by; death waits not the tardy approach of the messenger of peace; the love of many waxes cold; other sects avail themselves of the opportunity to increase their numbers; heart-burnings

and contentions are soon created; and speedily pure and undefiled religion is entirely forgotten. Now and then, a school-master conceives the bold idea that it is no sin for him to read the Bible to his neighbours; perhaps he makes a few remarks upon what he reads, according to his ability; the blessing of the Lord rests upon what he has done; and many cry out, as though they had heard an apostle preach,—what shall we do to be saved? The whole church wonders at the strange occurrence, imagining it to be a new thing that such effects should follow the preaching of any but a regularly ordained man; and, referring it to a lofty sovereignty, that declares nothing but its own existence, ministers and laymen sink into their wonted apathy. Now surely, there must be something wrong in that ecclesiastical policy, which is to be sustained at the expense of so many immortal souls, and which, in this country, is jeoparding the moral standing of one of the noblest nations in the world. If the love of Jesus, and the administration of his grace, form a perennial font, why should any part of our land be desolate and waste, as though a moral winter had thrown her icy bands across the waters of life. If illiterate fishermen, by the blessing of God, were sent out to convert the world, why should millions perish for lack of learned men?

And all this is done too, notwithstanding that our text calls for the ordination of elders in *every city*, and when the scriptures inform us that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in *every church*:—ecclesiastical arrangements, which, when interpreted by the principles of Paul's exhortation to the elders of Ephesus, clearly indicate that the spiritual wants of the church are to be supplied by the eldership, a class of men taken out of each community where the church is established.—And all this is done too, in churches where a class of elders, so chosen, have been actually ordained, and whose spiritual changes are technically called *vacancies*, or



churches destitute of the ministry. Shall all this be defended? While multitudes of immortal souls are perishing, shall we frame statutes to justify the elders in neglecting their trust? Can we be correct in forming a distinct literary class to supersede God's own institution?

So much for the value of forms, when called for under circumstances where they cannot be easily obtained; and in defence of our assertion, that the question, whether the apostles and evangelists did or did not ordain on their individual responsibilities, is a matter of pure indifference.

In extending our remarks upon the general question, it must be recollected, that an organized church is placed under the direction of the elders; who are therefore scripturally competent to meet all its demands. It might then seem that they have an ordaining power, and accordingly we are informed that Timothy was set apart to office, "with the laying on of the hands of the *presbytery*."—This will be admitted by many, who may dissent from some of the conclusions that will presently be drawn.

What is a *presbytery*? Our common idea has been that a presbytery is composed of a certain number of preaching elders, with an equal number of lay-elders, within a certain district. These lay-elders may or may not attend the meetings of the presbytery; and provided there are enough present to preserve appearances, the absence of the remainder is scarcely regretted: even the reason of absence is seldom demanded; or if it is, it is very likely *sustained* for form's sake. But no one seems to perceive the light that is thereby shed on the deficiencies of our social organization; or to reflect that the practical experiment has demonstrated, that large ecclesiastical establishments, whether they are supported by the civil arm or not, are at war with the genius of society,—at least in this age and country. The *district* over which a presbytery holds jurisdiction, may be either large

or small, according to the amount of the religious population.—Sometimes it may cover hundreds of miles, crossing mountains and floods with equal ease; and thus it associates a number of men together, to legislate for a variety of communities, about whose peculiar or local circumstances they are often most profoundly ignorant. Can it be matter of wonder, if they should often commit egregious mistakes; or that, in justifying their mistakes, they should appeal to deeply rooted prejudices, instead of the word of God? Can this be a scriptural presbytery, or can it be upheld but at the expense of individual liberty?

Let us examine the matter for ourselves.—The term *presbytery*, simply signifies a council of presbyters, or elders. The original word is used but three times in the New Testament, and in our translation is rendered *presbytery* but once. In the gospel according to Luke,\* it is said,—“And as soon as it was day, the *elders* of the people, and the chief priests and the scribes, came together, and led him into their council.” The original word here rendered *elders*, is the same which in the first epistle to Timothy, is translated *presbytery*. Had a uniformity of language been preserved, then in both cases it would have been rendered *presbytery*, or in both, it would have been rendered *elders*; and adopting the latter, then Paul would have given the following direction:—“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with *the laying on of the hands of the elders*.” The technical use of the term *presbytery*, would thus, under the sanction of our translators, be avoided; and the whole sentence would become more intelligible to christians in general: while we should have the scriptural fact in this form, that elders did ordain by the imposition of hands. And to us it would seem that if el-

\* Ch. xxii. 66.

ders ordained by the imposition of hands, they must themselves have been so ordained.

Paul, on a certain occasion, undertaking his own defence, says,—“As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the *elders*.” The original word here rendered *elders*, is the same translated *presbytery* in the first epistle to Timothy. A uniformity of language would again relieve us from something purely technical; while the addition of the word *all* would intimate to us that every elder belonged to the presbytery; which intimation, carried to the passage quoted from the first epistle to Timothy, would furnish us with this scriptural fact, that every elder, as forming an integral part of a presbytery, is entitled to ordain by the imposition of hands.—Our idea then is, that the elders of this church are the presbytery of this church; that they are authorised to ordain another elder, or other elders for this church by the imposition of hands, when wanted; and that as a presbytery, they are fully competent to manage their own affairs, without the interference of any other presbytery, or presbyteries, of any construction whatever.

And what is the constitution of presbyterian churches?—Do they not maintain the government of the church by *presbytery*? Do they not ordain by a *presbytery*? Do they not ordain by *the imposition of hands*? Unquestionably. And whence do they derive their right? They derive it, just as we have derived ours, and will refer to the same texts.—Has not then the whole train of reasoning pursued, advocated presbyterian principles?

But then there are points of difference, and they are worthy of consideration.

1. All the elders within a certain district do not belong to the presbytery of that district: i.e. they are all under its jurisdiction, but they may not all, at one time, share in its councils. The lay-elder, as he is called, comes as a

delegate. In a particular church, a lower court is constituted, termed a session, to which all the elders of that church belong; but only one of them, elected by themselves, can attend at any particular meeting of presbytery. And by what scriptural warrant is this done? None can be adduced. It is true, that the scriptures speak of elders that *rule well*, and elders that *labour in word and doctrine*: but that intimation of a distinction among elders, does not justify the reception of all of one class, and but a small proportion of those of the other class, into the constitution of a presbytery. Or if it did, certainly, as so large a proportion of the *ruling elders* is left out, the presbytery is not entitled to *rule*. But the simple fact is, that this constitution of a presbytery, practically gives to the *preaching elders* almost the whole opportunity to rule. The introduction of a small proportion of lay-elders creates the appearance of an equality which does not exist, while the introduction of the whole, would make sad havoc in a body where measures are often carried by *votes*.

2. None but *preaching* elders are ordained by the imposition of hands. There may, perhaps, instances be found, in which the minister of a particular church does ordain the elders of that church by laying on his own hands; in which case, he has only one step to take, and he rises from a parochial, to become a diocesan bishop. Neither are the lay-elders ordained by the *presbytery* at all. One single man ordains them, and our text might be perverted into a proof that the whole transaction is scriptural; while those who would do it, would tell us that the evangelist was a superior officer. And why should not every elder be ordained by the *presbytery*, and in the same manner?—This again magnifies the preaching elders, entitles them to a new degree of respect, and thus constitutes them chief rulers.

3. None but *preaching* elders ordain by the imposition of hands, when a presbyterial ordination occurs. The lay-elders form a part of the presbytery, and yet in an ordination, professedly done by *presbytery*, they are not allowed to take any part. How is this? By what scripture authority is this distinction made?—The whole thing, in all its forms, answers one practical purpose, which has already been stated.

Such then are some of the points of difference. They all arise from the introduction of *lay-elders* into the church; which must be considered as a pure piece of superfluous invention, that the scriptures have not warranted. This office is a mere human contrivance; or, as some tell us, a figment of the Genevan church, never heard of before.—But this has scarcely been suspected; for we have all been in the habit of supposing that our fathers were such good and holy men, that they never did any thing wrong;—these fathers, while we have been smiling so complacently at papal infallibility, have been our infallible men.—These things I say, not for the pleasure of finding fault, but my subject has been interlinked with them; and I could not pass them by on an occasion like the present, so interesting to a church which has been involved in such peculiar circumstances.

As to the habits of the ages after the apostles, I shall merely quote a few sentences, in relation to our present subject, from the writings of others who have professedly inquired into those habits.—“And as in those churches,” one says, “where there were presbyters, both they and the bishop presided together, so also they ordained together, both laying on their hands in ordination, as Timothy was ordained by *the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*; i. e. by the hands of the bishop and presbyters of that parish where he was ordained, *as is the constant signification of the word presbytery, in all the writings of the ancients.*”\*

\* Kings' Inq. Part. I. p. 62.

And again. "So likewise we read in Timothy,\* of a presbytery; which in all the writings of the fathers, for any thing I can find to the contrary, *perpetually* signifies the bishop and presbyters of a particular church or parish."†

Another writer, remarking on the "shorter epistles" of Ignatius, from which he had made several quotations, observes,—"It is equally evident, that the presbyters and *presbytery* so frequently mentioned in the foregoing extracts, together with the deacons, refer to officers which, in the days of Ignatius, belonged, like the bishop, to *each particular church*. Most of the epistles of this father are directed to *particular churches; and in every case, we find each church furnished with a bishop, a PRESBYTERY, and deacons*. But what kind of officers were those presbyters? The friends of prelacy, without hesitation, answer, they were the inferior clergy, who ministered to *the several congregations* belonging to each of the dioceses mentioned in these epistles; an order of clergy subject to the bishop, empowered to preach, baptize, and administer the Lord's supper; but having no power to ordain or confirm. But all this is said without the smallest evidence. On the contrary, the presbyters or PRESBYTERY are represented as *always present*, with the bishop and his congregation, when assembled; as bearing a relation to *the same flock equally close and inseparable with its pastor*; and as being equally necessary in order to a regular and valid transaction of its affairs. In short, *to every altar, or communion table, there was ONE PRESBYTERY, as well as one bishop.*"‡

These things being so, you may ask, how came the presbyterian churches to depart so widely from them, and to construct a *presbytery* upon different principles? Have they any good reason for calling the presbytery of each particular church a *session*, or for reducing the eldership below

\* 1 Tim. iv. 14. † Inq. p. I. p. 78. ‡ Miller's letters, pp. 146—7.

their own proper level, as though presbyters were not integral parts of a *presbytery*? Or why have they remodelled the presbytery, and substituted sectarian for scriptural law? There, brethren, is the difficulty. But am I under any obligation to meet it? If you have been furnished with scriptural truth, can you ask any thing more?—Perhaps, however, you may press the question. Then, that difficulties may not be all on one side, suffer me to offer one to your consideration.—Presbyterians tell us, that the account given in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, records the ordination of deacons. If so, those deacons were ordained by the imposition of hands. But presbyterians do not now ordain deacons by the imposition of hands; and why do they not? The answer to the one question, will fully meet the other.

Still this does not assign the reason:—what is it? The explanation is as follows:—The clergy have been generally, and but too justly, censured for love of power. The Redeemer charged the Jewish rulers with this detestable passion. The apostle John has penned the history of Diotrophes in few words,—“who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them.” The scriptures have been very particular in exhorting all Christ’s ministers, not to seek superiority. And any one, who is acquainted with the annals of the church, after the apostles had gone to their rest, will find Paul’s prophecy but too true,—that from among the elders themselves should men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them:—grievous wolves who did not spare the flock. The papal and protestant churches, exemplify our views in a most melancholy manner; while Europe, Asia, and America are the degraded examples of the effects of clerical domination. A controversy about the difference between the clergy and laity early began, in which the clergy triumphed: and ordination was soon

thought to be something exceedingly mysterious;—consisting, not simply in the recognition of particular men as appointed to particular work, but as imprinting a sacred character upon individual persons, as though they had been exalted above the race of mortals, for the mere purpose of being adored and obeyed.—It is a gloomy subject, and we leave it with the half and more untold.

But perhaps many may suppose that the peculiarities of our circumstances are not fairly and fully met, without replying to a fourth inquiry.

ARE NO QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED WHEN ELDERS ARE ORDAINED?

For my own part, I see no use in them. When men are nominated by the existing officers, and elected by the people, it is supposed that their qualifications and integrity are already ascertained or conceded. After this it devolves on the presbytery to ordain them as soon as possible, unless some good reason can be assigned for delay, and without stopping to catechise them. What can be gained by multiplying vows, or decking a divine ordinance with human appendages? If men will disregard their responsibilities to God, how shall we secure their fidelity by substituting their responsibilities to men?

I see no scriptural precedent for them. We have no formula on the sacred page, drawn out by an apostolic pen, nor the least hint given that such precise documents are requisite. When seven men were chosen to preside over "the daily ministration," their qualifications were previously specified; and when elected in consequence of the peculiar excellence of their spiritual character, no suspicions were started, no hesitation was betrayed, no questions were asked; but they were immediately ordained as chosen. It is true the Redeemer asked Peter some questions; but



Peter had fallen, had denied his Lord, and had shaken that confidence in himself which he should have preserved entire. Then the master interrogated him, and that concerning their personal relations. How simple! how touching! Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me *more than these?* This we may not imitate.—And if we should; as far as imitation could possibly be allowed, how many things now a days asked, would be left out?

I see much harm to result from them. Men learn to shift their obligation from the requisitions of divine law, and to measure it by some personal promises,—warily guarded, perhaps, by some mental reservation, or by a mutual understanding, which puts ideas and words at war with one another.—A door is opened which human authority may enter with all her stateliness; or by degrees she may force the human conscience into a submission to the ordinances of men.—Sectarian pledges are demanded and given. Church officers may be required to swear hostility to the errors of ages past, which exist not in the community where they may be called to labour, or exist only in name: or they must proclaim their militant pretensions against those, who,—sprung from a different parentage, placed in different circumstances, and animated by the *esprit-du-corps* of a different sect, are equally armed for contest,—may yet be his brethren in Christ. And all this will be called purity of doctrine, zeal for the faith, &c. The master would ask,—*lovest thou me?*

I would admit that a set of questions might be framed, which would be stripped of all these offensive qualities; or being divested of the most of them, would neutralize the rest. At least, the questions to be proposed this morning, have been framed under these impressions: they embrace nothing but the simple laws of official life, which every one understands; they may soothe long cherished feelings,

which ought not to be unnecessarily wounded, and without constituting a sectarian sacrament; they are based on no want of confidence in the integrity of the brethren who are to be ordained; they have no pretensions to any authority, with which, as men, we might be supposed to invest them; they impose no sectional creed which men have framed; and they are asked under circumstances, which, it is supposed, render them altogether harmless, and which appropriate them to the present occasion. If in the judgment of any, the exercise of human authority, or the imposition of a sectarian creed is implied, let it be remembered, these things are distinctly disclaimed. They are as follows—

1. Do you believe the scriptures of the old and new testaments to be the word of the living God, the only rule of faith and practice?

2. Do you promise diligently to exercise the gift which God has bestowed upon you, for his glory, and the good of this church, and in dependance on his grace, to “take heed to yourselves, and the flock” over which you are made overseers?

3. Do you promise to maintain “the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” and to cultivate love and harmony with your brethren in office?

I have now offered to your consideration all the argument on this subject which has been thought necessary. The result of the whole is, that the elders of this church, of which I consider myself one, intend, as a council of presbyters, or as the presbytery of this church, to ordain the elders whom you have chosen by the imposition of hands, because we feel ourselves scripturally called upon to do so. If we did not suppose that the Bible required this of us, we have every argument which custom, expediency, and our own general ideas of the present condition of religious society can offer, not to do it.

I have not the smallest doubt that this transaction will call forth a good deal of remark. Nor have I the smallest objection that it should. I love to see christians roused to talk about those things, which their master has given them to keep with all integrity until he comes;—provided they examine the matters about which they talk by the scriptures; and provided they talk in good humour. But when they begin to tell us about the wisdom, and piety, and authority of the fathers; when they tell us about their “excellent standards,” or would argue us down by asserting the *usefulness* of the ecclesiastical documents of past ages; when they excuse themselves from substantiating their strong and embarrassing declarations by the scriptures, as though the divine word was not entitled to speak upon the occasion; or when they “speak evil one of another,” and, under the strong impulse of sectarian feelings, would trample on individual character, and blast individual reputation; we retire in sorrow, saying—Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

In anticipating remarks, I foresee no objection which has not been fairly met in some part of this discourse, and which should detain us a moment longer, unless it may be this:—The elders already ordained in this church, excepting the preacher, have not been ordained by the imposition of hands: how then can they lay their hands on the heads of their brethren? The objection deserves attention, though it is more specious than solid. It may perhaps trouble some tender consciences; it may be a powerful argument in the hands of a wily sophist; and its refutation may call forth some remarks of no secondary value. I meet it thus:

1. It is not the imposition of hands that makes an officer. None of the apostles were so ordained. Though hands were laid upon the jewish elders, yet they were not laid upon the jewish high priest. There are many other things, vastly

more important than this ceremony, belonging to an investiture with office. There is a divine call, manifested by the communication of gifts, or indicated by a combination of providential circumstances. There is a man's own desire to do good, sustained by the well-formed decision of his own mind. There is the election of the people, conducted without intrigue, and as in the presence of the great head of the church. There are the necessities of society, almost foreclosing discussion, and shutting up an individual to the alternative, either to serve the church according to his ability, or leave immortal souls to perish; and there is a long, repeated, and public recognition of a man's official character and standing. We are not arguing upon the imposition of hands as indispensable to official action, but we think that we perceive it to be a scriptural form used in recognizing, or in setting apart to, office.

2. On former occasions, when elders were ordained in this church, we acted according to our knowledge. Such were the habits of the community of which we formed a part, and we complied with the general usage, never suspecting that there was a deficiency even in form. For myself I speak, my entire confidence in the opinions of my fathers, my own timidity in personal investigation, when it would lead out of the common track, and such like considerations, account for all my impressions, or rather, want of impressions. Providential circumstances have brought me where I am, and if truth is to be gained by enduring difficulties, then let difficulties come. The master has promised that they who love him shall not be tempted above that which they are able to bear.

Thus situated, must we still go on perpetuating our own inconsistency with scriptural enactments, because the line of *succession* has been apparently broken? Have we no provision, by which to redeem the bad consequences of an uninten-

tionally omitted form, in the superior value of moral principle? Did God make moral things to adorn physical things? Or did he make physical things to be subservient to moral things? Did he create man, rendered lovely and glorious by the impression of his own image, to set off this material fabric called earth, or did he make the earth for man? Is this earth worth one single immortal soul—can it redeem one man from the grave—or will it not be consumed by the Almighty's fires, when the ransomed are seated with Jesus on his throne? Were Eldad and Medad not ordained as helpers for Moses, because they were detained in the camp, and did not attend at the door of the tabernacle, where the consecrating ceremony was visibly exhibited? Must the hungry disciples starve, when walking through the corn fields, because it was the sabbath day? Was the sabbath made for man, or was man made for the sabbath? Must David not touch the shew-bread which belonged to the priests, but faint and die? Did Paul do wrong in circumcising Timothy, or act inconsistently in not circumcising Titus? Is our God, a God of mercy, or a God of sacrifice? Did he redeem us by the blood of his own Son, and will he cast us off because of some official informality? In fine, in complying with scriptural precedent in ordaining this day by the imposition of hands, is there no forgiving love to cover an omission, of which at the time we could not be aware; but must all that was moral and spiritual be sacrificed to a mere form, and must we painfully declare all these elders unordained, and their official acts unauthorized and unholy?—Surely, O surely, we have not so learned Christ. If not, then these elders are ordained, and may confidently act their full part as members of the presbytery of this church.

One more remark. You are deeply interested in having an additional number of elders; and so are we. You are deeply interested in having scriptural truth honestly and

clearly expounded; and so are we. You are not, however, called to ordain these elders, or formally to set them apart to their office; but we are. Your province was to elect them, as you have done. The ceremony of ordaining them is entrusted to us as your executive officers. You have set them before us, as the brethren of old set Stephen, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, before the apostles, and it simply remains that we do *our* duty. But every man must perform his duty according to scriptural law as far as he knows it; and we must discharge ours according to the scriptures, as far as we understand them. Should I then have failed to convince any of you, that the ordination should take place in the manner stated, still, as it is a duty we must fulfil for ourselves, you will not object to our doing it according to our consciences. And perhaps none of us will finally regret, that so marked an opportunity has occurred, whereby we can make our presbyterian principles manifest, and evince that we do maintain the government of the church by *presbytery*.

Having gone through the discussion, we shall now proceed to the ordination itself, hoping that all may attend us through it with a prayerful frame of soul, and that every heart will beat high with an anxious desire, that God may freely dispense his holy spirit, and grant, to us and to our beloved brethren, his richest blessings. We have given ourselves unto the Lord, that he may make us the charge of his watchful providence; and that he may sustain all our interests according to the munificent provisions of his own covenant love. —“Hear us when we call, O God of our righteousness.”