

I.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

In examining the economy of grace, it is essential to success to keep constantly before the mind a few elementary truths as land marks and sign posts in the wide field of investigation that is before us. The slightest mistakes at the outset can but prove fatal in our conclusions. We have seen that all systems and theories of "church polity" are of doubtful bearing, hence the endless failures in attempts to construct a perfect creed. All speculative views of church government but tend to darken counsel, by words without meaning. We remind our readers that the true organs of the spiritual body consist of the purified, sanctified, called and saved in heaven and upon the earth. All are but members of one family and are led by the same good spirit of our God. They are not only heirs of God but are the joint heirs of our Lord Jesus Christ. The members of Christ are "Living Stones, and constitute a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

We have seen that the first obligation which rests upon the world is a full submission of soul, spirit and body to God, in yielding obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not enough merely to have the heart changed, but the true convert is quickened and adopted into the

spiritual household. In order to live as becometh saints, after submitting to our kind Creator, it is quite as important to

“SUBMIT ONE TO ANOTHER”

The Spirit taught, they “should be subject the one to another.” Without this union of the materials of the body, it might still be said we are but “children, tossed to and fro, and are carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” We have noticed that, when the first converts were baptized on Pentecost, “about three thousand souls were placed together,” or put into living and working condition the same day. The saved were “placed in one,” or so organized and set in the body, as to enable them to “continue steadfast, in the Apostles’ teaching, in the fellowship, in prayer, and the breaking of bread from house to house.” The next matter requiring attention, is to ascertain

THE SCRIPTURAL TEACHING REGARDING THE INCREASE OF THE CHURCH

Paul informs us that, “The whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the manner of every part, maketh increase of the body in order to the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). The members are to be fitly joined together, and compacted, or coupled, yoked, or tied together, in a manner to walk and work

together in a common cause. Every part of the body, in order to effectual working, is justly measured of God. With these directions, we can scarcely avoid the conclusion that

THE DISCIPLES ARE ALL DIVINELY SET OR PLACED IN THE BODY

The members of the spiritual family are ordained especially of God to their work, for which each is best qualified. With this view, we can appreciate the statement that the Holy Spirit makes not only the Overseers or Bishops of the churches, but particularly calls, sets and leads all classes into the legitimate work. God makes it the duty of the Seniors, or Elders for instance, to occupy the place of Shepherds of the flock—they are the Overseers, Bishops and Rulers in the household. The young men are also divinely assigned the work to which they are called. The aged women are commissioned from above, ordained and set as the proper teachers of the young women. They instruct in daily business, in family matters, and in reference to all obligations of life. This brings us directly to the question as to

WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH IS OFFICIAL?

In the true Scriptural sense, every work of the church may be official, and every member under the Prince may be a high official with commission from heaven. Paul says, “We have many members in one body, but all mem-

bers have not the same office” (Rom. 12:4). The word here for office is practice and the Apostle intended merely to say that we have many members in the body, but each performs best the work for which his measure qualifies him. The doctrine of official or non-official service resembles somewhat the question,

“IS COMMUNION OPEN OR CLOSED?”

If the subject of “communion” has reference to Christian duty, it is only necessary to determine the value of our obligations to God. If the work is Christian, then all Christians, we presume, are required to perform the service. If it is the work of or for preachers, only or any particular class, then it is to be confined to that class. Our reading leads us to the conclusion that all the saints—all the obedient believers—all who have trustingly yielded their hearts to God, submitted to His Son in baptism, and are leading blameless lives in the church, are exhorted to examine themselves and so partake. Others are “without”—that is they are out of the body, and therefore have no rights common with the saints, at the table of the Lord or elsewhere.

We repeat that if any Christian service is official, all must be official. If any member performs his Christian obligations from the authority of official grace, all Christians likewise perform their service by special grace conferred. We notice that some imagine that the comparatively few officials, from their representative character, denote the church and many are disposed to assign all the labor

of religion and all the honor to a small class. When, however, we examine the word of God, we shall see that the inspired letters were addressed to the churches as collective assemblies fully authorized by the Divine Father to conduct the worship. If this is the Scriptural view, it is the birthright of the members, as the spiritual sons and daughters of the Almighty, to perform all the services of the household of the faithful. In this examination, to remove all doubts, there are various minor questions which require attention. It is said, for instance, that “What is everybody’s business, is nobody’s business.” This is merely saying that all are not competent to preach profitably, all are not equal in exhortation or possessed of equal ability as rulers, but it does not argue that if one cannot excel all his brethren in any particular department, he is therefore at liberty to spend his life in idleness—to abstain from all active service in the body. If physical labor is essential to a vigorous and healthful body and mind, spiritual service is much more important for growth in grace and the knowledge of the truth. Possibly the greatest religious error of the age is evinced by the prevailing ignorance in the church members regarding the true Scriptural divisions of spiritual labor. If we have departed from the primitive usages, it should be our ambition to restore back to the church the ancient customs. We deem it, at least, our duty to scrutinize closely the current theories of official service.

II. CURRENT THEORIES OF OFFICIAL SERVICE

The religious orders differ somewhat as to the plans of making church officers; but all agree as to the conclusion that all religious work is to be performed by a few authorized persons who act for the whole household. A few examples will answer for illustrating the subject.

Possibly, the ministers of Romish theology, and at least nine-tenths of the Protestant leaders, assume that with the Apostles of Christ they “are Ambassadors for Christ,” as though God did beseech the world by them to be reconciled. The true Ambassadors of Christ preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and themselves as servants for Jesus’ sake. “For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined into their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” They had “this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of men” (2 Cor. 4:5-7). All the treasures of truth and all things necessary for the salvation of the world were manifested through the Apostles of our Savior. This treasure was in earthen vessels, in the hearts of these holy and inspired men—and they, as the Ambassadors of Christ, preached it to the world. Since their

death, the treasure has not dwelt in earthen vessels, but in the sacred scriptures of truth; and as there has been no new proclamation and not the slightest addition to the old gospel of reconciliation, no additional Ambassadors have been needed; and all who have come in the name of Ambassadors, as Apostles of Christ, have proved themselves impostors and enemies of the cross of Christ. He who held the seven stars in his right hand and walked in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks said to the angel of the church at Ephesus, "Thou hast tried them who say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." If the early Christians tried and condemned the pretenders, it is still the right of Christians to act in like manner. Christ needs no new Ambassadors, and none, since the Apostles fulfilled their mission in delivering their message of salvation to our race, have been honored with a divine mission. Hence, all modern Ambassadors are without divine authority and are really the ministers of Satan, transformed into the ministers of light.

PREACHERS STILL PROFESS TO BE CALLED AND SENT AS WERE THE APOSTLES OF CHRIST

When Paul said to the disciples, "With the heart man believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," he asked the question, "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14, 15).

It will be remembered that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” By the ambassadors of Christ, the word of God was made known. Through them the words were spoken to a lost world and the whole plan of redemption was revealed and written by the finger of God in the New Testament. Before the revelation of the gospel was made known and before the New Testament was given, men were called to preach as the “Spirit moved them, or gave them utterance,” but when the inspired teachers had revealed all that was necessary to life and godliness and it was written for our instruction, we have needed no repetition of it; and if an angel were to preach another gospel, Paul said, “let him be accursed.”

The apostle quoted the prophecy, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach (make known) the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom. 10:16). Has any modern called and sent preacher been able to utter a syllable of gospel not written in the Scriptures? Has any one brought a word of “glad tidings of good things” to the world? All was brought by the inspired preachers and modern apostles have added nothing to the divine message. Such called and sent preachers as Paul described, have not lived upon the earth for nearly eighteen hundred years. John was the last. We have seen not a few in our travels who professed to speak as they were moved by the Holy Spirit and assumed the right to make known good news to the lost. But it is quite sufficient to say that, “all truth—all religious light was fully revealed in the first century and all professions of divine missions or commissions of being called and sent of God,

or officially endowed of the Father, to do anything in his kingdom of so extraordinary a character, is without the slightest authority of truth. Ignorance and wickedness lie at the foundation of the whole corrupt system of official grace.

THE MOST POPULAR VIEW OF OFFICIAL AUTHORITY

We feel safe in assuming that, in the Romish and Protestant churches, there are two classes of members: the officers and the people who constitute the “hewers of wood and the drawers of water”—the workers who support the ministers of grace; or as the distinction is more commonly made, the church is composed of the “clergy and laity.” While we have mentioned only Romanists and Protestants who suppose all spiritual work is to be performed by a few officials, we are forced to admit that others, as Baptists and often disciples of Christ, are quite as decided that all value is given to the ordinances of religion by the grace of official hands.

Baptist teachers, in our acquaintance, are unwilling to admit that baptism or the Lord’s Supper is legally administered by a Romanist or Protestant; such as Presbyterians, Methodists, etc., and if any one from these orders should signify a willingness to associate with the Baptists at the Supper of the Lord, he is informed it cannot be suffered. If pressed, as to the reason for refusing fellowship at the table, he is promptly told that, “he is not a member of the true church and has not been baptized by a regular-

ly ordained minister of the church.” Thus while our Baptist brethren bravely oppose the clerical assumptions of Rome and England, they in fact profess the same thing. They assume that their ministers have come in a regular line from the Apostles of Christ and therefore no one without the manipulation of Baptist hands, is authorized to partake with them of the Supper or administer a single ordinance of the Lord. But how much nearer the truth are those who recommend the Bible as the only authoritative creed, and yet maintain that ministers of religion are made by regular consecration to official authority? Call them Apostles, Evangelists, Preachers, Pastors, Bishops, Acolytes; Elders or Deacons—no one has the right to act, or the power to confer the grace of the church who is not raised from the ranks of the body, called out from the church, to minister in holy things and dedicated to the work. We have known old and apparently wise men among us to travel hundreds of miles to initiate others into what they called the “elder’s office.” The people too love to have matters in this fashion and many imagine this is the true mode of conducting the affairs of the kingdom of heaven.

We will relate an incident which sufficiently illustrates the dogma of official grace. Years since, we were called to see a man of wealth and influence die. When we entered the room, Doctor L., a distinguished Episcopal preacher, was at the bed side. His words to the man who was fearfully trembling on the verge of another world with the full consciousness he was not ready for the solemn change, were: “I am a regular minister of the gospel, my authority

to administer the sacraments has regularly descended to me from the Apostles of Christ, and if you will consent, I will administer to you the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and I believe that, by virtue of the grace that will flow to you through my sacred office, you will be willing to die."

While we have stated the occurrence plainly, the picture is by no means over wrought, and yet, any one must see that Mr. L. imagined that he was Christ's legate—was His Ambassador—and the whole grace of God was administered through his official hands. Not only do Romanists and Episcopalians tenaciously adhere to the opinion that all spiritual blessings—that the salvation of the soul and eternal life—are promised through official administrators of the ordinances and the more modern sects, which claim official authority to minister in matters essential, substantially claim the same mystic power. There lies before us a little work of 82 pages by a distinguished Professor in our most respected "Bible College," on the "Eldership"¹ in which the writer assumes that elders are officers made by certain ceremonies in the churches and the "Elders constitute a teaching and ruling board, one of whom is a preacher who lives of the gospel," while others bear their own expenses, in aiding to rule. This, the writer says, "Is scriptural and wise" (Page 67). These things bring fully before us the doctrine of ritualism as held in the denominations.

¹ This is referring to J.W. McGarvey's book, *A Treatise on the Eldership*.

This is a sample of the material contained in
The Church of Christ
by Tolbert Fanning

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