

An Address to My Brethr

by F.W. Grant

F.W. Grant's sermon addresses the decline of the Church, the presence of false teachings, and the importance of recognizing truth and living as new creatures in Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 24:24, John 10:27, Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Timothy 4:3, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "Apostasy Warning", "End Times"

Description

F. W. Grant preaches about the decline of the Church towards full apostasy, warning about the presence of false teachers and the denial of the Lord within the professing Church. He emphasizes the need for believers to recognize the truth of God's Word as their only commendation and to be vigilant against the many antichrists present in the last days. Grant highlights the importance of fully surrendering to Christ, being watchful for His coming, and not being deceived by the world's standards and false teachings that lead to division and confusion within the Church.

Transcript

AN ADDRESS TO MY BRETHERN AND FELLOW-MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH WHICH IS CHRIST'S BODY, KNOWN BY WHATEVER NAME. BRETHERN,-The test of even an apostle's message was the truth that he brought. Even the signs of an apostle wrought before men's eyes "in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" were never sufficient of themselves to accredit to his hearers the word he carried. The truth was its own commendation, and needed no other. Our Lord's own appeal was, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?"

And our Lord's own assertion is, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers." This is my comfort in addressing you, who personally have no claim or title to be heard. If the voice be Christ's, you will recognize it. If your will is to "do God's will," you will "know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Neither claiming nor desiring any thing upon my own account, if I bring you God's Word, your responsibility is to Him as to how you hear it.

Nearly eighteen hundred years ago, an apostle wrote that it was "the last time," and gave this sign of it, that there were "many antichrists." (1 Jno. ii. 18.) "Many antichrists" were then, for the apostle, a sign of the last time; and more, that "last time" had already come. In men's thoughts, those are the fresh first days of the Church's history. The vigour of youth was still upon her. In the memory of him who wrote the words

before us, pentecost yet lived; and on every side around him, as he wrote, the word of God was growing and multiplying.

More than two centuries of struggles and of triumphs were yet to precede its conquest of the whole Roman world. Yet here, before the very earliest "antiquity," to which men so fondly now look back - before the canon of Scripture yet was closed, or the last apostle had passed away, the words of that surviving apostle himself, (inspired words - Scripture which "cannot be broken,") assure us that even then the end, morally, had already come for the professing Church ; not triumph (alas !), nor a millennium -"the last time," and "many antichrists" Already had the apostle Peter uttered a warning as to the same thing.

That there should be false teachers among Christians, privily bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and that many should follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth should be evil spoken of. (2 Pet. ii.) To which Jude could add, when he wrote, that these men were already there; so that it was needful for him to write, exhorting earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. "For," he says, "there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation,- ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

There was no remedy for all this the Lord was coming to execute judgment upon them. "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment on all.' Quick work of ruin, brethren, in what had been once so fair. Apostles even yet in the Church, and the canon of Scripture not completed. Yet there, in that Church, were the objects of judgment, and the Lord coming to execute it! But we may go back further still, and put the testimony of another inspired writer side by side with Peter, Jude, and John.

In Paul's address to the Ephesian elders, mingled with the sorrow of his own departure from them, was the sadder foreboding of evil which should quickly follow to the Church of God. "For I know this, 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." And this so soon began,- so rapidly developed, that in his second epistle to Timothy, he writes as of a notorious fact, "This thou knowest, that all they which be in Asia are turned away from me."

Asia, the scene of so many labours ! Was Europe better? From Rome he writes to the Philippians, and he says, "All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ." "Many walk, of whom I have told you before, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Thus east and west were together departing from the Lord. And how does the apostle,- no man of gloomy views or narrow mind he at least,- how does he look at the future of that Church declined and yet declining from its primitive faith and love?

" Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." "Preach the Word ; ... for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables." "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

This is the apostolic picture - with no room for a millennium in it, no prospect of general revival or recovery, but the reverse. "The mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be

taken out of the way; and then shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit (or breath) of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming." Thus there is not a break in the darkness up to the coming of the Lord. The last days are the perilous ones.

The last time is known by the "many anti-christs." And that time, however God's long-suffering has protracted it unto the present, had morally already come when John the apostle wrote. Brethren, if this be so, where are we? As surely as the Word of God is true and reliable, the general Church is far gone on the path of decline toward the full apostasy that yet shall be. (2 Thess. ii.) A form of godliness there may be, and yet "perilous times." Dangerous work to be floating with the tide, accepting things because our fathers did; dreaming, after eighteen centuries of sad and miserable failure, that even now we are to undo these centuries of wrong-doing, and do, after all, what yet was never done!

Was there not energy and faith and love of old? Were not apostles equal to you in every natural and supernatural qualification for the work they gave their lives to? Does it no wise daunt you that the apostle Paul should have to say of places where all the signs of an apostle no whit behind the chiefest had been done among them, "All that are in Asia have departed from me"? or will you convince him of his error in predicting only an increase in evil, and the last days worst?

But you say you have God's promise and assurance that you shall convert the world. For He has said that "righteousness shall even fill the earth as the waters cover the sea." True, He has said this; but He has not said, you are the ones to do it, but the reverse. "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the earth with fruit." Is that the Christian Church? Indeed there is nothing plainer in the Word than that it is not. If you will listen to one who says he speaks to the Gentiles as the apostle of the Gentiles, he tells you plainly that just as the casting away of the Jews was the reconciling of the world, so the receiving of them back shall be life from the dead. (Rom. xi. ii.)

Moreover, he bids you, as Gentiles, "be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee." "Behold, therefore," says he, "the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell (the Jews), severity; but toward thee (the Gentile Church) goodness, if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise THOU ALSO SHALT BE CUT OFF." Brethren, have we continued in God's goodness? Why, then, talk of revival if there has been no decline?

But there has been, as even the Scriptures themselves show; which show, too, there will be no general recovery. What is the alternative, then? Cutting off. Yet God's purposes shall be accomplished. "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so ALL Israel - the nation, not merely individuals - shall be saved: as it is written, 'There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.'

Mark the definiteness of all this. Israel nationally blinded till God has His complete number of Gentiles gathered in, then all Israel saved; and how? By the gospel? No, but by the Deliverer coming out of Zion.' And it is distinctly added, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes," treated as such; their own distinctive promises held in abeyance, that God may gather the Gentiles into the Church; "but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sake; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Words how often quoted, but how seldom applied as the Spirit of God applies them here - to the calling and promises of the nation of Israel. 'I'hus, if the receiving of Israel be life from the dead for the nations of

the world, the "gospel" is not the means of their reception; but as long as it goes on, they are enemies for your sake. When the fullness of the Gentiles . is brought into the Church, the dispensation will change, the Lord come, and Israel, received as a nation, be life to the nations of the world.

Till the Lord come, then, there is no millennium, no conversion of the world by the Church. On the contrary, the expectation of it is the denial of the shame and failure of eighteen centuries, the proud self-assertion of Laodicea, "rich, and increased with goods, and needing nothing," not knowing that she is "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," and that the Lord is saying, "I will spue thee out of My mouth." Beloved brethren, for this fatal and disappointing dream of the world's conversion by your means, you have given up the practical hope of the Lord's coming.

Persuading yourselves things are going in the main right, you are accepting, with little scrutiny, the ways and means and associations by which you imagine the end you have in view is promoted. Yet the Lord is just ready to judge the whole scene and your own individual part in it;- yes, judgment is to close the scene which just now may seem so full of promise. Judgment at the coming of the Lord. For that coming we are taught to watch, because we know not when the time is. This is the answer at once to the mistakes of those who set times, near or remote, for His coming; and, on the other hand, to those who would put it off to the end of the millennium.

You know not when the time is ; therefore the Lord says, "Watch." You cannot watch for what you know will not come for a hundred years; how much less, a thousand. Nor can you say that the coming the Lord bids us watch for is not a real and personal one, except by such a mode of interpretation as would throw all Scripture into confusion, and all ordinary language too. For the Lord tells us it is a coming in the clouds of heaven with the angels, which all the tribes of the earth shall mourn to see, because it shall be in judgment like the flood; a day when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory and all the nations be gathered before Him; and He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. (Matt. xxiv., xxv.)

Yourselves apply these last words to the time of His real advent, and it is quite evident it is the same coming throughout both these chapters. Thus for this coming it is you have to watch, because you know not when the time is. Yet, brethren, how many of you give ear to the exhortation? You have suffered Satan to rob you both of the comfort and the admonition of your Lord and Saviour's words. And hence a multitude of errors, and of what He will judge as evil and dishonoring ways.

You lower the authority of Scripture by attributing to it human exaggeration, and therefore falsehood. How could a man not led of your interpreters suppose that that coming spoken of in the terms of the twenty-fourth of Matthew was either death or high-flown language for the simple destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans long ago? If it be so, why should there be any real coming of the Lord at all? Why should not all the passages about it mean something else than they so plainly say?

No wonder it should be thought that prophecy can only be clearly interpreted by its fulfillment, if these are really its interpretations! But our inheritance, brethren, our "exceeding great and precious promises,"- what about them? Are they not unfulfilled prophecy? What if in result all these should dwindle down proportionately, just as the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven has dwindled down into the sacking of a Jewish city? Alas! infidelity thanks you for the lesson which it has not been slow to learn; but the simple and ignorant man, whom you have delivered blindfold into the hands of your interpreters, will scarcely thank you for the proof that the grand and blessed Word of his God is but, as to much of - it, a

more than half deception,- and how much, he cannot know.

From hence a wide uncertainty results. The wise and learned differ, it is found; how, then, shall the unlearned be sure? And "charity" is invoked to cover all mistakes, by asserting - save as to some fundamental points, (that is, some points believed to be essential to men's salvation,) - the humility of universal doubt, Indeed, the Lord has said that "whosoever will do God's will shall know of the doctrine;" but then you must not say that you do "know." You have your opinion; I have mine.

Between the two, the authority of the Word is gone. The Bible is God's word, no doubt; but it is scarcely "what saith the Scripture" any longer. It is "What say your doctors?" And, in despite of His own word, His sheep cannot know Christ's voice from the voice of strangers But another thing. The Scripture saith, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." That applies, you think, only fully to the past; Christianity is rapidly changing that. As we progress toward the millennium, the world must certainly be growing better.

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," says the apostle. But that too has ceased to be. Doubtless it was of such a change already begun at Corinth that he wrote, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye, have reigned as kings without us; we are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honor-able, but we are despised." It is very true we get on far better with the world in these days. And times so changed make it difficult to understand how we "are not of the world."

All its harmless pleasures we partake of; all its honours we aspire to and obtain; we find it our positive duty to "get on" in it, and do good to ourselves, that men may speak well of us; we do not believe that Satan is the "prince of this world," for we are its soldiers, its magistrates, its politicians. Brethren, where are we? Is this progress? or is it deterioration? Is the "offence of the cross ceased"? or have we ceased to bear it? And are these words "hard sayings," which we cannot bear even from the lips of our Lord and Master?

"But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers of the false prophets." But the Church, too: the Church it is that all the nations are to flow to yet. Kings are to be its nursing fathers, and queens its nursing mothers. It is the heir of all Jewish promises, the divinely appointed successor to Israel's place and portion.

Nay, it is but one and the same Church all through, that Jewish and this Gentile. Its law is ours; its union of church and state, its earthly head, its priestly order, its ceremonial services, and its worldly sanctuary; its earthly blessings and dignities, contended for and maintained by carnal weapons,- all, all, are ours. Points of detail may be changed without disturbing the essential unity. The Church, Jewish or Christian, is all one. So you maintain; with what result it is not difficult to see.

For, brethren, the Jewish nation, or church - for the nation was the church - was no pilgrim or stranger upon earth assuredly. "Days long in the land;" "blessings in casket and in store ;" "to be the head only, and not the tail" among the nations, and their enemies smitten before their faces; these were the things plainly, though conditionally, promised them. If you are successors to all these, who are the successors to the apostles and the primitive witnesses for Christ?-" fools," and "weak," and "despised;" "hungry," and "thirsty," and "naked," and "buffeted," and "having no certain dwelling-place;" blessing when reviled ; persecuted and suffering it?.

The law is your rule of life, and holy and just and good it is, though as many as are of its works upon that principle are under the curse, as the apostle says. But whose is the "rule" of being a "new creature in Christ Jesus," crucified to the world by His cross, and glorying in it? (Gal. vi. 14-16.) You find no pilgrim or strangership in your rule, and that may suit you; but you find no glories of the new creation in it either; nor does it speak to you as a heavenly people, sanctified and sent into the world as the Father sent His Son.

All this is nowhere,- the Christian's place no higher than the Jew's,- the standard of walk no different; for, of course, if the law is your rule and was the Jew's, there cannot and ought not to be any difference between your walk and his: your place in Christ and its responsibility is gone, for of this the Jew knew nothing. But "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Brethren, what does this mean "a new creature"?

A new sort of creature, as the word implies? Do you go back to Adam, the pure and innocent man in the garden in which God set him to dress and keep? Nay, that would be no creature new in kind. Adam even, pure and good before his fall, was yet "of the earth, earthy." Is Christ but the first man set up afresh? Nay, verily; He "is the second man, the Lord from heaven." Let men cavil as they please, He is a heavenly man, a second - another sort, a "last Adam"- head of a new race - beginning of a new creation; and you and I who believe are "in Him," seen and accepted before God "in the Beloved."

"As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the Heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." The image of it we have not yet: true. That will be ours in the day of His coming. The thing we are. "Heavenly" and "in Christ"! Oh, brethren, think you we realize our place and portion-" old things passed away, and all things become new"? Do you and I know what it is to look up into those heavens, where the Son of God sits in glory all His own, and see and recognize in Him what we are before God-" as He is," even "in this world"?

Can we say quite confidently, each for himself, "Yes, we are identified with Him who represents us there before the eye of God - as He is, in whom no spot was ever found nor can be, but perfectness after God's own heart wholly ?" That it is to be in Christ - a new creature. Our rule is, to "walk in Him," as being what we really are,- heavenly, citizens of heaven, pilgrims and strangers upon earth. All the rest, the cross has ended for us. We have died with Christ out of our old Adam condition; our old man is crucified with Christ.

The flesh is in us still indeed, but in us as a foreign thing; and we are not in it before God, nor identified with it in any wise, but with Him in whom it was never found. We are in Him,- as He is. Brethren, can we own this and seek to get on in a world that crucified the Lord; whose prince and god is Satan, and friendship with which is enmity against God? Can we claim rights where we are dead? Can we take up carnal weapons where He has bidden not to resist evil? Can we take the law with others where God has shown us grace ourselves?

Can we be magistrates and politicians where Satan is really prince? Can we find ease and enjoyment where every step of His way led Him on to a death by wicked hands, even the death of the cross? "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. . . .

He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life - shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." "Sell that ye have, and give alms: provide yourselves bags which wax not hold, a

treasure in the heavens that, faileth not, - for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately.

Blessed are those servants whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come forth and serve them." The effects of not watching have been in every way disastrous. You are waiting for death and judgment rather than for Him who has conquered death and borne judgment for you. These are indeed the common portion of men as such. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment."

And you have forgotten so the distinctness of your own portion, that you account it enthusiasm for a man to say with the apostle, "We shall not all die," and almost heresy to affirm, as the Lord does, that "whosoever heareth His words, and believeth in Him that sent Him, shall not come into judgment." Yet both are simple Scripture statements, which the holding fast the Lord's coming gives to the soul in full and unclouded reality. For those who are watching for Him, what more simple than the apostle's language-"We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord"?

Is death to these a necessity - a thing "appointed"? And as for judgment (though we shall all give account of ourselves to God), when "the Lord cometh to execute judgment upon all," even Enoch tells us, He "cometh with ten thousand of His saints" (Jude 14); or, as Paul says (Col. iii. 4), "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." "For this we say unto you by the Word of God, that we which are ALIVE AND REMAIN unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them that are asleep.

For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (i Thess. iv. 15-17.) That is our portion who are His, living or dead, when He comes: "Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

Mark that! Not everybody at His coming, but "they that are Christ's at His coming." That is the divine "order." "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we (the living) shall be changed." Thus shall we go up to meet the Lord. It is the fulfillment of His own promise, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." Blessed, blessed words ! Are they a call to judgment, think you, reader? Do you expect a sentry and a challenge at the door of the Father's house, or to be put on trial, and judged according to your works, to see if you have title to enter there? Does He not, then, "know them that are His"? May there be in the company of those "raised in glory" or "changed," and having "put on the image of the heavenly," one who perchance may yet have no title to be there?

And the "dead in Christ," who have been many of them more than a millennium "absent from the body, and present with the Lord "- will you put them on trial too, to see if they were indeed rightly there? No; it is all forgetfulness of the place we have with Him,- of His love, and of the value of His work. We have forgotten that if it be true, as it is, that "God shall judge the world in righteousness by that Man, whom He

hath ordained." It is written no less that we "are not of the world, even as He is not of the world," and that "as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and, blessed alternative of man's natural portion - "to them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation."

This is our hope, beloved brethren, to be with Himself before He comes to execute judgment; and when He does appear for that, we know that we also shall appear with Him. The common doctrine is a cloud upon this precious hope, and no indirect question of the certainty of salvation itself. If the day of judgment is to decide who are the saved ones, it is no wonder if many think they cannot be sure even as to themselves before. And if we are to be judged then according to our works, who but must shrink from the thought of it?

The result is; on the one side, legality seeking to rest on its own performances in view of the day of judgment; and on the other, the lack of comfort and assurance because on this very ground. How different the believer's position as stated in Rom. v., where "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"! How different a thing it is, to be seeking to make one's self fit to pass the judgment, and recognizing the grace which has already given me a place in Christ in the day of grace and of salvation !

"Herein is love made perfect with us (see the margin), that we should have boldness in the day of judgment; because as HE is,"- as Christ in glory is,"-so are we in this world." (1 John iv. iv.) The day of judgment will not upset the confidence of the day of grace, for we shall be with Him, and like Him - the judge, before that day comes. We are now as He is. When He shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory. Bear with me a little, beloved brethren, yet; and suffer a further question.

We have spoken of that Church so dear to Christ, for which He gave Himself. If I turn to the picture of it which I have, in its first bright days, it is impossible not to ask of that Church which is the body of Christ, united together and to Him by that Spirit by which we are all baptized into that one body (1 Cor. xii.), Where is that Church now? "It still remains," you say, "scattered throughout the various bodies of Christendom." Well, that is true, no doubt; but then, what scattered it? and more, what keeps it scattered?

Was it an evil for it to be scattered? and is it not as great an evil for it to continue scattered? You may say, "We neither scattered nor can bring it together again." That is true too : neither you nor I can undo what has been done. But we can surely own the evil, and ourselves cease from it; and that we are called and bound to do. And then what about these various bodies of Christendom, among which (you say) the true Church is scattered? Plainly, they are not the true Church themselves,- for that very reason, 'that the true Church is scattered' amongst them.

If, then, they are not the true Church, what are they? Do they even represent the true Church, as far as an outward, visible body may? They do not, for they are not one body, even professedly, but many; and by the very fact of what they are, to be a member of any one of them is to be not a member of the rest. Thus these bodies do not even represent the Church of God. They are societies of people who are associated together upon the ground, not of membership in the body of Christ, but of holding certain views which distinguish them from other Christians.

And that (suffer me to say it, brethren; the appeal is to Scripture in the matter,-) that is true sectarianism, "schism" in the Bible sense, "schism in the body" (of Christ). Mark it, then, brethren: it is no schism to be

outside these bodies. It is a duty; for by the very fact of being united to them, I separate myself so far from all those who, though true and devoted Christians, cannot give in their adhesion to the creed or to the regulations of the sect. The moment I get the true thought of the Church of God, I see it to be a body into which Christ the Head admits, and He alone, for He alone baptizes with the Holy Ghost, and by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.

Scripture owns no other membership than this - the being members of Christ,- of His body. If you and I are such, we belong already to the Church, and have to "receive one another, as Christ received us, to the glory of God." He who imposes conditions is guilty of dividing the body of Christ, not he who cannot in conscience come under the conditions. That discipline is to be maintained is of course true, but that is not in question here. Aside from this, the gathering together of Christians as such, apart from all denominational distinctions, is the only "assembling of ourselves together" that the Scripture knows.

Do you say, "Well, but that assembly of Christians as such must be subject to the order which Christ has instituted for His Church"? I answer, Surely so; but that is too small a loophole to admit all or any of the ecclesiastical systems of the day. Tested by the Word of God, these all founder upon this, that they put into men's hands the power which alone belongs to Christ, - give Him nominal headship, but not actual, and subject the conscience thus to men and not to God. All human regulations, however wise and expedient in all their design, yet as regulations, necessarily do this.

Who has power to regulate in the Church of Christ but Christ? Not the whole Church together, much less any class or section in it. Are not the Scriptures able to furnish thoroughly to every good work? What want we more? Are all your creeds, confessions, canons, and what not, clearer and more forcible than the Word itself? Are your liturgies the supply of a deficiency which the Head of the Church has not provided for? Alas! is it not all sheer dishonour done to Him, and in reality a subtle form of unbelief in His only authoritative Word?

But, again, I read that Christ has given gifts to His Church: some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. The apostles and prophets remain as the foundation (Eph. ii. 20); the others carry on the building to this day. Evangelists labour in the world outside, pastors and teachers in the Church inside. The possession of the gift entailed the responsibility of using it (i Pet. iv. io), for He who gave it could not have made a mistake in - giving it.

Now, once more, suffer me to ask,- and if it be folly, bear with me in my folly,- whence did men get the control they exercise over the gifts of Christ? Who gave them power to ordain or appoint or choose or send out or locate and settle the servants of another Master? Is it no interference, think you, with Himself, that He has given the gift to use, but you are to give the authority to use it? I ask for scripture to show that men were ever ordained to teach or preach at all.

It is too scanty a foundation for it to adduce that Paul and Barnabas were separated to a special work among the heathen, by the imposition of the hands of prophets and teachers. (Acts xiii.) In the first place, Paul certainly was not ordained then; for to some of the very people to whom he was then sent, he declares that he was "an apostle, not of men, nor by man." (Gal. i. i.) Secondly, the work to which they were set apart was simply a definite mission among the Gentiles, which chap. xiv. 26 tells us was "fulfilled;" but Paul's apostleship did not end with that.

Thirdly, they were prophets as well as teachers who acted in the matter. And, lastly, "the Holy Ghost said, 'Separate Me Barnabas and Saul,'" not See if Barnabas and Saul are proper persons to be separated. In

other words, He pointed out to them directly those whom He would have sent, not gave them authority to choose and send. Then Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every city. And afterward, Timothy and Titus, as apostolic delegates, did the same. But though an elder should be "apt to teach," his vocation as an elder was not to teach, but to "oversee."

It is well known that the word "bishop," the elder's official title, means "overseer," and is so translated, Acts xx. 28. They were elderly, grave men, fathers of families, who could show, by the careful training of their own families, that they knew how to take care of the Church of God. They tended, were shepherds to (as the word translated "feed" means Acts xx. 28; i Pet. v. 2,) the Church of God. If they had gift, they laboured in the Word and doctrine (i Tim. v. i7), but they might rule well without that.

Not that they were separate classes of elders, for which there is no scripture at all; but if they had gift, they used it; yet it was not confined to them. These elders never ordained. Apostles did, and could depute others. In Timothy's case, who was no elder, when a spiritual gift was given to him by prophecy, it was accompanied with the imposition of the elders' hands. That is the whole scripture on the subject. As for the successors of the apostles, or of Timothy or Titus, they exist in the fables of tradition, nowhere else.

Scripture speaks only of a wide-spread ruin of the Church, beginning in the apostles' days; and these commend us to the Word of God in their own absence, not to successors. (Acts xx. 32; 2 Pet. i. is.) Why do I speak of this? I would gladly be spared having to do so, and have been thus brief, as desiring to call attention to the subject, rather than pretending to make all plain. But the evils resulting from the common view and practice are great and many, and would justify a much longer notice.

When I turn from the blessed Word of God and its teachings - from its free and simple ministry in love to all and any where, of whatsoever anyone might have for the common good of all,- when, I say, I turn from this to the narrow systems of men, where hired preachers have each their little circle in which their voice is alone entitled to be heard,- when I see the sheep of Christ oftentimes clinging to those who cannot feed them, (even if they teach no positive heresy, and are themselves Christian men,)- just because they have the commission of men, and refuse other teachers who have not, or are not their ministers, as they would say, what can I think, beloved obrethren?

And this is one grand evil of the system, that by maintaining the need of an external commission from those who are supposed to have authority to give it, the commission is, as the result, made the test of the truth. The truth ceases to have entire authority. Christ is made to commission men who do not preach it,- nay, often men who are not His at all. And yet they say there would be confusion from allowing Christians to act simply upon their own conscience to God, and that men would not know whom to listen to or believe in that case.

Is not that as much as saying that Christ's sheep do not hear His voice, and that they will hear the voice of strangers? Brethren, there is still, thank God, a living, acting Head to the Church, His body: One who cares for His own as tenderly as ever,- yea, as when He laid down His life for His sheep; One who, Himself at God's right hand, has sent down, in His own absence, "another Comforter," to abide with us forever. The Holy Spirit is really present with us in that place of infallible Guide and Director in the Church of God, which is falsely and blasphemously claimed by the Roman pope.

Alas! are Protestants conscious of His presence, and of what the fact of His presence involves? For if He be here, must He not be sovereign? Once He did act, and was acknowledged,- set apart men to their several spheres of service, as well as gave capacity to serve,- sent men hither and thither at His will; and

the whole Church, in its coming together, could be trusted to His guidance, without prayer-book, priest, or president,- each man left to his own conscience before God; all "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

The rule was, as to worship, "in spirit and in truth;" the rule as to ministry, "all things to edification." In the public assembly, the women were to be silent (1 Cor. xiv.). The one exception shows how large the liberty for all else. But I close, though having scantily uttered what was on my mind. But, oh, for a heart rightly to feel all the deep dishonour we have done to Him in the ruin we have brought in everywhere. Repair it, we never can; but we can judge ourselves about it, "cease to do evil, learn to do well." Our resource and hope is, the Lord Himself is coming, to end it all, and in the bliss of His own presence, for the feeblest and most failing of His own. May we be waiting for Him.

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