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James E. Scobey

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BEING A SCRIPTURAL EXAMINATION
OF THE SUBJECT.

BY
JAMES E. SCOBEEY.

NASHVILLE, TENN.:
MCQUIDDY PRINTING COMPANY.
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PREFACE.

Two years ago, in answer to a question about elders, I wrote some articles which were published in The Bible Student. At the suggestion of the editor, these, with an addition of a short statement in reference to the subject of "Ordination," were published as a tract. This tract, however, did not treat of some things pertinent to the eldership; and, therefore, to some it was unsatisfactory. It was suggested that I write a tract covering fully the subject in all its scriptural bearings. This I have attempted in the present work. It has been my purpose to seek the truth and to present it for the consideration of all who desire to know what the Scriptures teach on the subject of the "Eldership."

It is desired that this tract receive a careful reading; that neither prejudice nor prepossession shall be allowed to bias the mind of the reader while engaged in the examination of the subject; that all may see eye to eye and speak the same things, and this will we do if we see the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

Hoping for the best results in the publication of the tract, we commit it to the consideration of all those who in any way may feel an interest in a subject which has been a fruitful field of discussion, even among those who claim to speak as the oracles of God speak.

JAMES E. SCOBEEY.

Mount Pleasant, Tenn., September 20, 1902.

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JAMES H. HARRIS.

London, England, June, September 1892.

THE CHRISTIAN ELDERSHIP.

The subject of the "Eldership" has been one of the questions upon which there has not been unanimity of thought among professed Christians. This confusion arises from a misapprehension of what is taught on that subject in the divine oracles. If agreement on this question is desirable; if, indeed, it is necessary, it must come through patient investigation and honest, earnest discussion.

Perhaps no one who has been engaged in these investigations and discussions has yet seen all the truth pertaining to the subject. However, I believe that substantial progress has been made. It is difficult for any one to see a thing different from that he has early learned it to be. This want of power to discriminate between that which is true and that which is false is not always prejudice, but oftener may be referred to simple prepossession.

Prejudice actively exerts itself without reason, and sometimes contrary to reason, against receiving anything which does not harmonize with prepossession. I think that among the disciples there is little prejudice existing in reference to the subject. Our prepossessions may have much to do with the character of our

thoughts; but we should always be willing to think soberly and to express a righteous judgment.

Having heretofore written and published a short tract, entitled "The Eldership," which has been extensively read and generally well received, and criticised mainly for its brevity and failure to cover the entire field, I now feel that I am better prepared to set forth the teaching of the Scriptures in reference to the whole matter. Indeed, I am sure I have been much profited by all criticisms made, whether favorable or unfavorable. I am fully aware of the fact that the tract hitherto published was not entirely satisfactory and did not meet some questions which necessarily arise in the discussion of the subject of the "Eldership."

Brother David Lipscomb, in the Gospel Advocate, says: "We have received from Brother J. E. Scobey a tract of twelve pages, entitled 'The Eldership.' . . . We have read it carefully, and believe, as far as it goes, it is a scriptural statement of the eldership. . . . One point of interest is ignored—that is, how those fitted and qualified for the work are to be recognized or known as elders."

There has been considerable discussion on this point by brethren, and I feel that I have been benefited by it. I hope to be able, on this point, to give at least what authoritative teaching there may be at my command. Our conception of things must be clear before we can present adequate ideas concerning them.

In the investigation of the eldership, our first inquiry will be:

WHO ARE ELDERS IN THE CONGREGATION?

In answering the question, "Who are elders?" it is my purpose to give a scriptural answer. Certainly every one who is familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures understands that there was a certain class of persons called "elders" in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. We find elders mentioned even before the introduction of the Mosaic institution. (Gen. 50: 7.) These were the elders of Egypt. The class called "elders" originally meant only the more aged and experienced of a people. They were always deserving of respect among the ancients. They were the heads of families, and were the chief men of tribes. We have only to consult the history of the Jewish nation to see that this is true.

When Moses instituted the passover, he "called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families." (Ex. 12: 21.) "Elders" here means simply the older and more responsible members of the families. In Ex. 17: 5-6; 18: 12; 24: 1, we shall discover that the same idea is clearly set forth.

Now, when officers were selected, according to the suggestion of Jethro, Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people—rulers of

thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. It is certain that some of these rulers—officers—were elders, and the probability is that all of them were; for in Num. 11:16 we have this language: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them.”

From this we would be justified in concluding that some elders, at least, were not officers. I am now persuaded, after a more thorough investigation, that the term translated “elder” never at any time, or anywhere, means or signifies an officer. The word is applied in the New Testament to the Jewish elders thirty-two times; to Christian seniors, thirty times; elder son, one time; eldest, one time; old men, one time; elder women, one time. In none of these places, I think, can the word have any official signification. I am persuaded, too, that in all the Old Testament Scriptures the Hebrew word is never used to designate office. Elders, from their age and experience, have been in both dispensations revered and obeyed. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, said: “Rebuke not an elder [older man], but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters.” (1 Tim. 5: 1, 2.)

Does this mean that these were officers—the elders and the younger? Nay, verily; no one would be bold

enough to so affirm. Where in the Scriptures does "elder" mean officer? Echo answers: "Where?"

In the primary sense of the word all the older men were called "elders," and, as we have seen, were thus classed. But all the older men were not, then, shepherds or bishops—were not doing the work of a shepherd; neither are they now. Some of the elders are bishops, shepherds, and overseers in the congregations, and some are not. As I understand, when reference was made to the bishops they were often called "elders." The expression "the elders" is used to designate the bishops or overseers; and when the term "elder" is thus used, it has reference to the bishops or overseers, because it comprehends bishop—a species of elder. Paul left Titus in Crete that he might "set in order the things . . . wanting, and ordain elders in every city," as he had been directed or appointed. (Tit. 1: 5.) I think it is quite clear that Titus was to continue and perfect a work already begun by Paul; that he had been specifically instructed by Paul as to how he should do all his work. The word "ordain" in the text is misleading and "appoint" is little better. Every one has his proper place and proper work in the body of Christ. Titus, by the direction of Paul, must give the elders their proper place and work. The ordainer will not controvert this statement. Now, how? The word translated "ordain" simply means to place or appoint, and "appoint" simply means to designate. When

Paul came to Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," etc. (Acts 20: 28.) This the Holy Spirit did by instruction. Titus did not make overseers. By direction of the Holy Spirit he taught whose duty it was to do that work in the church; and whether or not they did it, nevertheless the Holy Spirit made them overseers, and for this reason Paul urged them to do their duty. An overseer may be in line of duty or he may be neglectful of it; but whether he be faithful or unfaithful, still, he is nominally an overseer if he has been appointed one; and it would not matter how made or appointed, whether by the church, the evangelist, or by both combined, or by the Holy Spirit. The point is, that the Book teaches that upon the elders in the congregations the Holy Spirit has placed the duty of the bishopric. It is their especial duty to shepherd the flock.

It should be constantly borne in mind that "elder" is used in two different senses—first, in the sense of the older, more experienced in the church; and, second, in the sense of a bishop or shepherd or overseer. It cannot be said to be used exclusively in the one sense or the other. Generally, the subject and the context will enable the reader of the Scriptures to discriminate properly in reference to the meaning of the term in any particular passage. The apostles claimed to be eld-

ers, for Peter said: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder [a fellow-elder]." (1 Pet. 5: 1.) It will be observed that the apostle was addressing the scattered Christians in various countries—Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. This was a large territory, in which we must believe there were many Christians and many congregations, and they were mainly Gentiles. From this passage I learn that Peter belonged to the class called "elders" and to the class of elders to which the others belonged. I am also persuaded that there were no congregations then, but that among the Christians elders were to be found. I am still further persuaded that there cannot be a congregation of Christians without an eldership—that is, some older and some younger in it, just as all the churches to which Peter referred. It seems evident that the older, more experienced men among the patriarchs and Jews were called "elders." From this class the advisers and officers were selected.

So in Christianity from the elders—the older men—the bishops spring. All scriptural bishops are elders. but all elders—old men—are not bishops. Doubtless these bishops in the apostolic age had supernatural gifts of the Spirit by which they were qualified for work in the congregations.

In all spiritual matters man must have leadership. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

(Jer. 10: 23.) What was true of man then is true now. Man now needs the leadership of God as badly as he ever needed it. It has always been offered man, and is still to be had. He who hears the apostles and prophets of Jesus hears him, and he who hears Jesus hears God. Real spiritual leadership never leads astray, and, when followed, directs man to the highest honors and secures for him the greatest blessings. Pseudo leadership never fails to bring man to misfortune and to death. We cannot follow any man in safety if he does not follow the Master. So the apostle Paul admonishes Christians: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11: 1.) It would be profitless spiritually to follow even an apostle if he were not a follower of Christ. We must submit to those who have the rule over us just as long and as far as the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus directs. The leading thought in reference to the elder is that he, like a shepherd or bishop, is a leader. He must lead the flock in the paths of peace and righteousness; and this he constantly does by following the Master, walking in his ways, and admonishing others to do the same thing. In every congregation, elders, in the sense of the older, more experienced, are found. Among these may sometimes be found one or more capable of teaching, admonishing, and directing the others according to the words of the Master. Should he—by the consent and encouragement, tacitly or otherwise, of the

others—addict himself to this labor of love, then he, being already an elder, becomes at all events, *de facto*, a bishop or shepherd.

In answer, then, to the question, "Who are elders in the congregations?" I am sure we can have no difficulty in giving a satisfactory answer, provided we understand the sense in which the term is used. In the primary sense they are the older men in the congregation; in the secondary or modified sense they are the bishops or shepherds. Some of the critics of my former tract seemed to be unable to grasp this thought, and would maintain that "elder" and "bishop" were always synonymous terms, and endeavored to hang me on the horns of a dilemma because I had admitted that "elder" and "bishop" were sometimes used in the same sense and in reference to the same person, and, when so used, the two terms were synonymous. "Elder" is a more general term than "bishop" and embraces a larger number. "Bishop" is a species or kind of an elder, and he is an elder occupying a particular relationship with reference to the members of the congregation that some other elders do not hold. In other words, "elder" is the class and "bishop" is the species, as I understand it. Hence, logically, every bishop is an elder, but every elder is not a bishop; every lawyer is a man (or woman), but every man is not a lawyer. Only the older can be bishops, but age may still be unequal to the work of the bishop in its fullest sense. Perhaps there may not be

found in any congregation now one who is qualified in every particular to do all that bishops are required to do; but that should be no excuse for not having those in the congregation who can, striving to do the work, and, at the same time, striving to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. The idea is altogether too prevalent in the minds of the professed followers of the Christ: "I will not try to do anything because I cannot do everything." Remember the one talent.

Those who contend that "elder" is synonymous with "bishop" and that every elder is a bishop and where "elder" is used it means bishop, are forced to this position because they contend that evangelists now make the bishops or elders. If this position is true and the contention can be sustained by the word of the Lord, then there are no elders, bishops, overseers, etc., where no evangelist has exercised his prerogative in *ordaining* them. I quote from one who says: "The very same thing that made them elders made them bishops. Elders are to be appointed; God has ordained it. Evangelists were authorized to do it; *no one else was*. [Italics mine.] The special work of the evangelist will not cease so long as there is a demand for that work; and the demand to-day is as great as, if not greater than, in the days of the apostles." The special work here referred to I understand to be making elders in the churches. According to the contention, there can be

no elder or bishop until he is made by an evangelist; but of the making of bishops and other workers in the congregations we shall have more to say in another part of this discussion. Still, I want to say here that the conclusions, as stated, are wholly untenable, even if "bishop" and "elder" were altogether synonymous and could, at all times, be used interchangeably. I am thoroughly satisfied that no man now can make an elder or a bishop, especially if the making carries with it the idea of conferring power or of giving any sort of ability or authority. A man in religion can assume nothing; God, in his wisdom, has taught through the Spirit all that we as Christians must do.

In the beginning of the doctrine of Christ—in the earliest assemblies—men, whatever their abilities, must be taught duty and obligation (what they must do). This was the business of Titus, and this did Paul and Barnabas. They still speak; they still say who are to be the bishops in the churches; and we are not left to the poor judgment of some self-constituted evangelist, claiming both the ability and authority of Titus to appoint or ordain bishops or elders for the churches of Christ. The Book nowhere teaches that the apostles did the selecting of bishops, nor, as for that, other workers in and for the churches; much less did Titus. All that either the apostles or Titus ever did was to set the elected or selected persons over the work; this is evident from the meaning of the term used in the origi-

nal. Whatever we may think or say in reference to this particular phase of the subject, what the twelve did in reference to the seven is what Titus was commanded to do in connection with the elders.

The second conclusion stated is: "An evangelist is the only one authorized in the word of God to ordain, appoint, elders." To show this conclusion is without warrant, I have only to mention that the example of the apostles is in the Book; they did appoint elders: But you may say: "There are now no apostles Paul and Barnabas." So I may be permitted to say that there are now no evangelists of the same character and authority as Titus. I know we have some who are styled "evangelists," or who style themselves "evangelists;" and in an ordinary sense they are, but not in the sense in which the term is used in reference to Philip, in Acts 21: 8, or to those mentioned in Eph. 4: 11; 2 Tim. 4: 5. We now have no supernaturally endowed men in the church. Maybe Titus was an evangelist of the character mentioned in Eph. 4: 11. They were for the perfecting of the saints. It is reasonable that now, having every necessary duty of every class clearly set forth, the necessity of the supernatural work of the evangelist would cease. If not, why not? Timothy and Titus must be regarded as evangelists when they were evangelizing, but servants of Paul when doing his work. They were both engaged in the same kind of work. Paul exhorts Timothy to do the work

of an evangelist, but ordaining elders is not the work of an evangelist.

I take it that no one will now maintain that we have any evangelists of the same species as that of Timothy and Titus. They were doubtless of the kind spoken of in Eph. 4: 11-13: "And he gave some, apostles and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some shepherds and teachers; with a view to the perfecting the saints for the work of [the] service, for building up of the body of the Christ: until we all may arrive at the unity of the faith." (Literal rendering.)

The Scriptures give us clearly to understand that in the beginning—in the early churches—the chief workers were all supernaturally endowed for their work and were continued until the unity of the faith should come. There were in the churches then supernaturally-endowed elders or bishops. Of this there can be no doubt. They were to continue until the unity of faith came. There are numbers of religious people who think that the unity has never come; that spiritual endowments are still bestowed and especial gifts and powers are given for the work of faith. The apostle Paul gives us clearly to understand that all miraculous manifestations were to cease, and nothing would be left for us but faith, hope, and love.

We are sometimes asked how we can think that the unity of the faith spoken of by the apostle has come, when the followers of Jesus have different faiths or be-

liefs. Such persons are laboring under a misapprehension with reference to the meaning of the term "faith" as used by the apostle in this connection. In 1 Cor. 13, the apostle makes use of this language: "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge [supernatural], it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. . . . And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Supernatural endowments—gifts of the Spirit—were to continue until we come to the unity of the faith, and should cease when that which is perfect should come.

I think, then, we are justified in concluding that "the unity of the faith" is equivalent to "that which is perfect." An entire collection considered as one thing is a unity. The entire system of salvation—embracing all that God has done and proposes to do on his part and all that is required of man to do on his part—may certainly be called "the unity of the faith" and "that which is perfect." The gospel is the faith once delivered to the saints. We are no longer under the law of Moses, because the faith (the gospel of Jesus Christ) has come, and we now, in all things, must be governed and directed by it. It is a perfect rule—a unity.

Now, I can understand what the apostle meant—

after enumerating the supernatural powers which were given at first for guidance and teaching, which were to cease and pass away—by saying: “Now abideth faith [the gospel, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus], hope [that which it always inspires], and charity [the only thing necessary on the part of man].” Love will cause man at all times and under all circumstances to seek and to do the will of the Lord, to obey the gospel in all things. We know we love God when we do his will; so the apostle John teaches. I can also understand why love is chiefest on the part of man; for without it the gospel would be a nullity to him and he would be without hope and without God in the world. Jesus said: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Hence, love is the first duty of man toward God; it is, indeed, the greatest thing man can have on his part—the chief power in an earnest, consecrated life to the service of God. The heart, imbued with the love of God and man, reflects the spirit and life of the Master, who went about doing good.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS WHO ARE BISHOPS—THEIR WORK OR OFFICE.

Upon this branch of the subject there is little divergence of thought, especially with reference to the

first item. There may be some difference in reference to what they should do and how they should do it. In reference to the qualifications, there is little chance for difference, since these have been so clearly set forth by the apostle Paul in his letters both to Timothy and Titus. In reference to one qualification, two views have been maintained. The Book says that he "must be blameless, the husband of *one* wife" (not two or more). The original indicates that he must be a one-woman man; he must not be a many-woman man—not, as I understand, that he *must have* one wife or even be married. Many, from reading the Authorized Version, have concluded that no one can do the work the Scriptures require of elders, as bishops, unless he be a married man; and some go so far as to bar him unless he has children to rule. It seems more reasonable for us to conclude that no polygamous man is maintaining such a course of conduct as becomes a Christian, and is, therefore, in no position to lead others in the strait and narrow way. A literal rendering does not emphasize the thought that the elder *must be married*, but, as I understand it, not married to two or more wives, if married at all. If he has any children and does not hold them in subjection, does not so rule and lead in his own house well, it is manifest that he will be a failure when he is called on to lead men, even in the church. It can scarcely be expected that one who is not an elder can successfully discharge the duties of the bishop;

hence, he must not be a novice or new convert, a *younger*. The qualifications of men in any part of the field of endeavor can be known only by knowing what they can do, and no evidence is so good as actual doing of the work. Paul says that the deacons must also be tried. As I understand the teaching in 1 Tim. 3: 1, a man, though old and having been in the congregation for a long time, would not be a fit leader for the flock who had not given evidence of his fitness by actual trial; and hence the necessity of growth toward the standard erected by the apostle. The elders must be tried, and the deacons must also be tried, before they can serve. A literal rendering of the passage is this: "And these also, let them first be proved, then let them serve." Certain qualifications and ability for the successful performance of the duties of the bishop or elder are necessary before he can be scripturally recognized as a leader of the flock.

THE WORK OR OFFICE OF AN ELDER—BISHOP.

Without reference to the method of their becoming elders, in the sense of being bishops, let us see what is their work or office. They must (1) "take heed unto" themselves; (2) "and to all the flock;" (3) "to feed the church of God"—Acts 20: 28; (4) must support the weak; (5) remember that "it is more blessed to give than to receive"—Acts 20: 35; (6) to take the oversight (bishopric) of and to feed the flock of God—

1 Pet. 5: 2; (7) to rule (lead) well; (8) to be able to exhort by holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught—in teaching; (9) to convince the gainsayers (in the congregation) by sound doctrine—Tit. 1: 9; (10) to be ensamples to the flock; (11) to “comfort the feeble-minded”—faint-hearted; (12) to be “patient toward all men”—1 Thess. 5: 12-14; (13) to take “the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly”—1 Pet. 5: 2, 3. It is evident from the teaching of the apostles that the bishops, shepherds (elders), in the church were the rulers (leaders). Paul, in writing to the Hebrew brethren, exhorted them thus: “Obey them that have the rule over you.” Obey your leaders, those who teach and admonish according to the word. Intelligent leadership, addicting itself to the ministry of the saints, should receive recognition, because of the labor of love. (1 Cor. 16: 16.) It is difficult for the average elders of the present day to distinguish between intelligent, faithful leadership and the arbitrary exercise of lordship; between doing the will of the Master and having some one to do the will of the elders, or, as they term themselves, “officers.” It is the duty of all to submit to the leadership of the elders when in the line of their duty. (1) The well-being of the flock must be their study; (2) they must provide for its needs; (3) being chief men in the church, they must be ensamples in all good works; (4) especially must they teach, exhort, and admonish whenever and wherever circum-

stances may allow. (Acts 20: 31.) The eldership is the ministry (servants) of the church. A church with a faithful and competent eldership should want for no good thing. Even in the days of the apostles such overseership was not always found. The same misfortune attends Christian congregations now. Oftentimes the older, better-informed, and more competent man is pushed aside, and a novice is thrust upon the congregation to carry out some scheme of designing men who are ready to make merchandise of the gospel, or who think gain is godliness. The eldership can make no laws for the government or guidance of the disciples of Christ, either in work or worship. It simply leads by being led of the Spirit of God. They can, at all times, speak the mind of Christ; they can execute his every commandment; and in doing this they will serve humanity and honor and glorify the Master and our God.

“OFFICE” AS APPLIED TO ELDER.

I use this heading that I may bring to the attention of the reader what I conceive to be the most unfortunate misapprehension in reference to this whole subject. After years of observation and patient investigation, I have become thoroughly convinced that in no part of the New Testament is it taught that some in the congregations are officers, while the others are not. The division of the members of the congregations into the two classes of laymen and officers is not what is taught in

the New Testament Scriptures. Indeed, there is no such idea as that indicated by the term "office" when used in the general acceptation of the word. The general and specific meaning of the term, when used in reference to the relations of men toward each other, is "a dignity attended with a public function," and an officer is one "invested with an office;" and "invest" means, when used in the sense above, "to endow, as with an office." To clothe one with dignities, emoluments, and authority, separating him from other men, would be endowing him with office. In this sense I feel sure that there are no officers in the church. But "office" has another meaning, and can be applied to anything and everything one may do or have to do; and in this sense the meaning is fully set forth by the following definitions: "Peculiar or appropriate business, employment, or function; charge, duty, service." In this latter sense every one has an office—a business or work to do; but we all do not have the same office or work. It must be observed in this connection that while every one has an office or work to do, it does not follow that he is to be called an "officer." The word "officer" is properly used with reference to those only who have been "invested with an office, either civil, military, naval, or ecclesiastical." With this signification, I feel sure the word "officer" cannot be found when Christians are referred to in the New Testament. I am aware of the fact that Paul says: "For as we have many members

in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." It seems quite an easy matter for those who contend for church officers to see in this passage a warrant for their contention. There is no intimation in the text of any one's being an officer. Certainly, the parts of the natural body together constitute the body; and those who belong to Christ constitute the body in Christ. The members of the body have different functions to perform or work to do in the body; yet their work so harmonizes and they are so related that they constitute the body. So the members of the body of Christ, though they may have a different character of work to do, are, nevertheless, the body in Christ. If the text teaches that any one or anything is an officer because it has an office or a work to do, then the members of the natural body must receive that honor. The hand, the foot, the eye, the nose, would all be officers. In this passage, then, we fail to find an officer. A literal rendering would be the following: "And all the members have not the same thing to do." So away goes your office; and, as a matter of course, officers follow. Indeed, wherever the word "office" is used in the King James Version in reference to Christians, the literal translators have universally used other words, which shows conclusively that the ideas of office and officer are not in the Book, but belong to the language of Ashdod. When reference is

made to Christians, whether elders, deacons, or bishops, neither "office" nor "officer" is found. If we are to conclude that we all have some office, as is contended because Paul said, "All members have not the same office," then I am prepared to say and justified in saying that every member of the church is an officer, or there are no officers.

I am frank to confess that the King James Version gives ground for the belief and practice of the religious world. In Rom. 11: 13 the king's translators make Paul say, "I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office;" but the Greek of the passage says distinctly: "I am apostle of [the] nations; I glorify my service [not office]." So in 1 Tim. 3: 1: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." This passage, if literally rendered from the Greek, would read thus: "If any one exerts himself to be engaged in overseeing, he has set his heart on a commendable employment." I am perfectly sure in this passage that there is no such idea found as official position or relationship. Indeed, Christianity gives work for all, suited to the several capacities and powers of each one. Read Rom. 12: 4-8, and we shall at once perceive that the business or work of each member depends on natural or acquired gifts or powers, and not on election and ordination, as now practiced by high-class ecclesiastics in the various religious bodies. Modern organized religion—that or-

ganized by man—would have the business or work one must do all to depend on an election to and an induction into an office. All of which they think creates or makes one an officer in the church; and they call this inducting into the office “ordination.” It is God, and not man, who has determined all this matter. “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” (1 Cor. 12: 18.) He has not left the matter to the wisdom, caprice, or folly of any man or set of men, whatever may be their calling or whatever they may call themselves. It may be in place to say here that I have been accused of rejecting the plain statements of the Bible, because I have in some instances rejected the translations of the Authorized, or King James Version. I am not conscious of having at any time rejected, or sought to alter, change or amend, the plain and certain teaching of Jesus or the apostles and prophets who spoke by his authority. That I have rejected and do reject, and still refuse to be bound by, some of the translations given in that version, I admit. In doing this, I feel that I am doing the cause of truth an eminent service. The criticisms and changes which I have made in the rendering of certain passages, I am sure, are in harmony with those of the best scholars of the age. While the King James Version is good and has been used so long, that does not give it immunity from criticism. There are quite a number of versions extant, and no one of

them, perhaps, can be said to be the best in all particulars. It is known, however, that some of the terms used by the translators of the King James Version are unauthorized and misleading. We have already had occasion to refer to some of these, and in the course of this discussion we shall refer to others. It is not surprising that they—the translators—should have given the renderings of the Greek into English, as they did, when we consider the fact that they belonged to a church whose every member was taught that there were in the church laymen and officers, and that the laws of the country made provision for the support of these officers. Early training and prepossession have a great influence in shaping our thoughts and giving color to our beliefs. It was so with them.

However, before we proceed farther, let us see where we are. We have determined who is an elder and what he is in the congregation. An elder exercising himself in caring for and serving the flock is a shepherd; regarded as an overseer, he is a bishop. These words no more signify office than "merchant," "farmer," or "blacksmith." They are simply words indicating the work the elder is especially performing or doing in the congregation. We have also found that an elder cannot fully do the work of an overseer or bishop unless he has certain qualifications, which are clearly set forth in the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus. We have found, too, that "elder" is sometimes used in the sense

of bishop or overseer, or is used when they are referred to; that from the class called "elders" spring the chief workers in the churches, especially the work which may be done only by men. We have found, too, that the members of the congregations are not divided by the Book into the two classes of officials and nonofficials, into lay members and ecclesiastical functionaries. Indeed, we have discovered that there is no such idea as office and officer in the Book, if that Book comes to us translated from the original Greek, literally, as it should be, without the coloring which ecclesiasticism demands to support its theories of church organization and church government.

Since we have stated that in all churches or congregations meeting for worship on the Lord's day, elders would usually be found, and generally bishops or overseers, it may be asked by some whether before entering upon their especial work they should be *ordained*. This leads us to the investigation of the question:

MUST ELDERS BE ORDAINED?

Before we proceed to answer this question, it will be necessary for us to understand what the term "ordain" means or embraces as used in reference to elders and others in the church. According to the teaching of what are termed the "orthodox churches," it consists in a solemn ceremonial rite by which the candidate is inducted into his office. Preparatory to this ceremony

there is an election or selection of the candidate who is to receive "holy orders" by being ordained. Ordination properly attended to, according to these ecclesiastics, consists in the ceremony of fasting, prayer, and the imposition of hands on the candidate for "holy orders." Now, I inquire: Is it necessary that this be done before a Christian can properly do what is required of the elder? If it requires this ceremony to make an officer in the church, then we can easily dispense with it, as there are no officers to be made; but if it be necessary to the qualification of an elder for his legitimate work, then, by all means, let the formulary—the ceremony—proceed; let the fasting, the praying, and the "laying on of hands" be attended to with all the dignity and solemnity usually attending these things in the most popular orthodox churches. I believe that it is not now contended that anything in particular is to be given or bestowed by those imposing hands, except an office, which can be obtained in no other way, and the duties of which cannot be properly performed without its having been attended to. I understand the word "ordination" means, as used by those who engage in or contend for the ceremony described, an induction into an ecclesiastical office, and nothing more; that when hands are laid on and the remark is made by the administrator, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," it is believed that, while he may or may not really impart the Holy Spirit or any supernatural gift of it, still he does impart an

office in which inhere certain powers and prerogatives, and to which are attached certain duties and responsibilities.

On this subject of the "Laying On of Hands," we shall have more to say farther along in our examination of the subject of "Ordination."

Now, as a matter of fact, is there such an office in the church that one can never fill unless he be elected to that office and subsequently inducted into it by some formal ceremony? I am well aware that almost, if not quite, all of Christendom, both Catholic and Protestant, accepts this idea and proceeds to elect and formally set apart, ordain, their officers, from the highest to the lowest. Of course men do have work in the church which differs. Some are evangelists and some are pastors and teachers. How did they come to be these things? In the primitive apostolic church we are told how they became pastors and teachers. In Eph. 4: 8-11, it is said: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." These were given by Jesus. But how do the churches now have some of these officers, if not all? Paul told the presbyters of Ephesus how they became overseers. He did not say that he made them overseers, or that Barnabas did, or that any one else did; but he did say: "Take heed . . . unto yourselves, and

to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost [Spirit] hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God." I believe it is not now generally contended, by our brethren at least, that "ordain" is the proper word to use when speaking of the induction into office of those selected, but "appoint" is the word. Hence, elders and other officers in the church are appointed, and this is done by a ceremony of appointment, the example of which is found in Acts 6: 6. It is contended that the church selected the men having the qualifications suggested by the apostles and set them before the apostles, who then proceeded to appoint by using the formulary or ceremonial of induction to office—to wit, fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands. In harmony with this idea of appointment, it is thought all officers of the church are made, appointed, or ordained. But it must be observed that in this instance nothing is said about fasting; but this item can be easily supplied if we will skip over to Acts 13. There we can find, it is supposed, authority for fasting where there is given an account of what is said to be the ordination of Saul and Barnabas. This church at Antioch was a fasting and praying church. The prophets and teachers of this church had been engaged in that business even before the Holy Spirit said: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts 13: 2.) In order that this scripture harmonize fully with the ideas of the ordainers, it should be translated thus:

"Appoint to [for] me [or, better, *ordain*] both Barnabas and Saul to the office to which I have called them." But there is nothing of this kind in the text. Neither the prophets nor the whole church, the one nor the other, nor even the two together, made any selection; nor did they do the appointing to office or anything of the kind, so far as these scriptures give any light. But it is clearly stated by the Spirit that the work which they were to do had been chosen by the Holy Spirit (and I understand this to mean by the Lord), and he had also appointed them to do the work. The Holy Spirit informs these prophets and teachers at Antioch that the time had now come when Barnabas and Saul must cease their connection there and go to the work they had been called to do. Indeed, they had already been chosen and appointed by the Lord for this mission. They needed no second appointment or ordination. The Holy Ghost doubtless spoke by the mouth of one of the prophets, making known the will of the Lord. Barnabas had hunted up and brought Saul to Antioch. Both remained there among the prophets and teachers, and day by day, as they ministered to the Lord, fasted and prayed, doubtless receiving revelations necessary to prepare them for the great work of spreading the gospel among the heathen, establishing churches and teaching Christians, and qualifying them by gifts of the Spirit to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. To do all that would be required

of them necessitated patience, perseverance, and a training which they received, especially, at Antioch; indeed, they remained there until they were endued with power from on high. With all their natural and acquired ability, there was something more needed that they be able to successfully carry forward the grand work to which they had been called. This supernatural power—spiritual gifts—was given them, as I believe, at the time the prophets at Antioch laid hands on them. If not then, then when? In the great missionary campaign which they made to Asia, most wonderful spiritual manifestations were seen in their work; so that when they returned to Antioch, they declared what great things had been done by them through the grace of God. In the closing part of Acts 14 it is said: "And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God [or, literally, given over to the care of God] for the work which they fulfilled." I desire that the reader specially note the fact that the Holy Spirit said: "*Separate* me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." They did the separating when they stayed and sent Barnabas and Saul away. Whatever they may have done either before or after this, when they departed for the work the separating took place. Further note that it is here

stated that Barnabas and Saul had been recommended to the grace of God—that is, given over to the care of God—at Antioch, before entering upon the work they fulfilled. I think it is clear that their companions—the prophets and teachers at Antioch—did that before the separating act. Now, unless this recommending to the grace of God is also *ordination*, pray, how did they commit—recommend—them to the grace or care of God? For one to commit any other one to the grace or favor of God is to do all he can do that the favor may be bestowed. Is there a better way than to pray and to put our hands upon them if we have anything of that favor or grace we can thus bestow? Indeed, is it not plain that the fasting, praying, and laying on of hands in this case, at least, is no part of the separating or appointing to the work or ordaining an officer, that he may exercise himself in doing a special or even a general work? Jesus appeared unto Saul of Tarsus to make him a minister and a witness, to send him to the Gentiles to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto the living God. Jesus chose Saul; Jesus sent Saul; Jesus qualified him by that which he saw when he fell to the earth on his way to Damascus, by that which Ananias did for him at Damascus; for Ananias having laid “his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and [might-

est] be filled with the Holy Ghost." Two special and necessary things were to be done through the agency of Ananias: (1) Saul was to receive his sight and (2) was to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Doubtless Saul received a gift of the Spirit through the imposition of the hands of Ananias; if not, how, then, did he receive the power to preach the gospel? Saul was further qualified by his visit to Jerusalem (seven years after the beginning of his service in preaching Jesus—the gospel—which he said he did not learn of men), where he made the acquaintance of Peter and James; more especially was he further qualified by his visit to Antioch, in company with Barnabas, where he remained for a whole year engaged in preaching, teaching, and being taught.

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simcon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, . . . and Saul." (Acts 13:1.) Saul seems neither to have been preëminent nor prominent among these prophets and teachers; but he was being prepared for the great work for which Jesus had chosen him, which was to be that of the apostle to the Gentiles. But it is contended that in the case of the seven at Jerusalem the apostles promised the multitude that if they would select the men they (the apostles) would *appoint* them over the business. Now, in the first place, I want to say that while the Revised Version

discards the word "ordain," it uses the word "appoint;" and though this perhaps represents to the mind a simpler idea, still, the idea in the text is not clearly set forth by it. Every Greek scholar knows that the word translated "appoint" in Acts 6: 3 would be properly translated thus, "Whom we may place over these things of our hands"—or, in other words, "this business." When one has been nominated or selected to do something at the direction of another upon whose approval he may enter on the work, consent being given, he may begin to act. If he needs any suggestion as to his duties and the principal could bestow it, certainly he would do it.

We read in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." (1 Cor. 12: 28.) These seven selected by the multitude at Jerusalem, whatever they may have been or done before or after their selection, were made helpers of the apostles. This class—the helpers—were of those who had supernatural endowments or gifts of the Spirit. The foregoing scripture shows this to be true; they were *helps*. Now, it is generally conceded, I believe, that spiritual gifts were in no case bestowed after the inauguration of the church among the Jews at Jerusalem and among the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, except by the imposition of hands.

While there was complaint made in reference to the neglect of the Grecian widows, I understand the apostles had had the bounty given for the poor distributed by others than themselves. That there be no further complaint, the congregation, at the direction of the apostles, chose suitable men—principally Grecians, as their names imply—to take the work off the hands of the apostles which would leave them free to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. Now, I can see the necessity of the apostles laying hands on the seven, which harmonizes fully with every case of laying on hands in which the reason is specifically given for the rite. They were to take all that part of the work in ministering to the poor which had devolved on the apostles, as well as that part which the apostles had probably intrusted to other and less skilfull hands. The apostles would free themselves of the whole business and turn it over to others who should have the same authority in the matter as they themselves had had. Hence, they bestowed on them, by the imposition of hands, the grace of spiritual gifts. While nothing is known particularly of the subsequent history of a majority of the seven, still, we do know about Stephen and Philip. In a very short time Stephen was preaching Jesus and the resurrection; we find Philip going down into Samaria, preaching the gospel and astonishing the people by signs and wonders which he did. Whence this wonder-working power? When bestowed, and by whose hands imposed?

Was it not by the laying on of the hands of the apostles at Jerusalem? If not then, when?

The incident of placing the seven at Jerusalem at this work is the sheet anchor of all the doctrine of *ordination* or *appointment* as practiced by the various churches. This must serve as an apology for our having devoted so much time to it already and for still inviting the attention of the reader to a further consideration of the subject.

I deny that there is, or can be, any ceremony of appointment. There may be ceremonies before or after an appointment, but the ceremony is no part of the appointment. It is argued that fasting, prayer, and the imposition of hands were parts of the appointing ceremony on the occasion of appointing the seven at Jerusalem. It is further said that "we should follow apostolic precedent and lay hands on elders." Now, I remark that it cannot be shown that these men were elders or were made elders by the laying on of the hands of the apostles; and I further state that I do not believe it can be shown that the apostles ever laid hands on any one as a ceremony of appointment. The apostles did pray and lay their hands on the seven; Peter and John did pray and lay hands on the Samaritans; Ananias did lay his hands on Saul, who had fasted and prayed; the prophets and teachers at Antioch did fast, pray, and lay hands on Barnabas and Saul; Paul did lay hands on the twelve at Corinth, on the Ephesians, and on Timothy; the elders

did lay hands on Timothy; the elders did lay hands on the sick. What for? According to the doctrine of the *ordainers*, the apostles one time laid hands on the seven to make them officers. To what office were they ordained or appointed? They were not made bishops or elders, not evangelists, not prophets or teachers—no, not any of them. Then, what? “Deacons,” you say. Well, there is no one officially called a “deacon” in the Book. The word “deacon” occurs in only four passages in the Common, or King James Version, of the New Testament—(1) “The bishops and deacons”—Phil 1: 1; (2) “Likewise must the deacons be grave”—1 Tim. 3: 8; (3) “Let them use the office of a deacon”—1 Tim. 3: 10-13; (4) “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife”—1 Tim. 3: 12.

The word from which “deacon” is translated in these passages occurs thirty times in the Greek Testament. It is translated “minister” twenty-one times; “servant,” six times; and “deacon,” three times. In the fourth place in which the word is translated “deacon,” the word is a verb. The word “deacon” is no official title any more than “servant.” Indeed, if it is, then we shall be forced to the conclusion that Jesus, Paul, Peter, Simon’s wife’s mother, Mary Magdalene, Martha (the sister of Lazarus), and all the apostles were deacons. But this proves too much, though it is claimed that the seven were made official deacons by the apostles at Jerusalem. If it be true that the seven were

made officers to feed the poor, then I think that Aquila and Priscilla and Paul were official tailors at Corinth; for their craft was such that one might infer that they also stitched garments.

The conclusion of the whole matter is this: That every man or woman who served in any capacity, whether public or private, was designated by the term in the original translated "deacon." Hence, any faithful servant of Christ, whether preaching the word, building up the weak, distributing to the necessity of the saints, clothing the naked, or visiting the sick, is a deacon or server; but it must be denied that any one of the words translated "deacon" is used technically to signify office or officer.

Brother Lipscomb, in the Gospel Advocate, says: " 'Appoint' is a word so simple it is difficult to define. It literally and etymologically means to 'point at.' To point at a man and say, 'That is he,' is to appoint him. That is all there is in appointing."

I also quote from a letter I received from Brother E. W. Herndon, in which are statements that I am sure are trustworthy. "(1) 'Ordination' is not found in any English translation of the New Testament. This word means 'the act of setting apart to an office in the Christian ministry; the conferring of holy orders.' Since this is the meaning, what Christian could say he believes in 'ordination?' (2) 'Appointment' is not found in any English translation

of the New Testament. It means 'the act of setting a person apart.' I would, therefore, suggest that we cease using the word in connection with evangelists, elders, or deacons. If the acts of 'ordaining' or 'appointing' are not found in any English translations of the New Testament, the presumption is that there was no 'special act' connected with the setting apart or appointing of elders, etc., in the apostolic age."

LAYING ON HANDS.

In the ceremony of ordination as practiced by orthodox churchmen, when hands are imposed, the administrator says: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." It may be that there are many who would lay on hands, who, though making use of this formula, would still not contend that either the Holy Ghost or any special supernatural gift was bestowed, but that instead an office was conferred. The language used in the ceremony of ordination, however, indicates clearly what the ecclesiastics, and especially the Pope of Rome, believes about the laying on of hands. They think—indeed, they know—it was done in the beginning to impart the Holy Spirit. They feel perfectly sure that every officer of the church, under apostolic rule, had a gift, or gifts, of the Spirit. The Catholic Church practices the imposition of hands to impart spiritual blessings now. I agree with them in believing that generally, if not universally, during the infancy of the church, gifts of the Spirit were

imparted by the laying on of hands upon all who were charged with public ministration or service. So when the language, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," is used, the true primal design of laying on hands is indicated. All understand that hands were imposed for the specific purpose of bestowing spiritual gifts and blessings. Modern churchmen may, and do, practice ordination to make officers. They who are thus made officers will not be officers of the church of God, however, because God's church has no such officers.

It is, however, contended that, whether there is any office or not, there is *ordination*, and no one can be an elder until he is ordained by fasting, prayer, and the imposition of the hands of an evangelist. It is true we have in the King James Version the word "ordain" used twice; the word "ordained," nineteen times. Now, if the ordination of elders were a formulated ceremony, consisting of certain acts, such as fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands, we should have no difficulty in finding it and recognizing it in each case where the word is used. When we use the word "baptize," we know what that means. In the use of the word "ordain" in 1 Cor. 7: 17; 9: 14, R. V.; and Tit. 1: 5, in vain do we look for any imposition of hands. In the first two cases the word simply means "to direct;" in Tit. 1: 5 the word translated "ordain" means "set," "to place;" and metaphorically once in the classics, "appoint." There are twelve different words in the original

translated "ordain." Not one of these words has the slightest reference in meaning to the imposition of hands, and but one, in the remotest manner, refers to hands at all. When things are out of order and are placed in order, then they may be said to be ordained. When, by authority, I direct certain things to be done, I then may be said to ordain them. These are the senses in which the word is generally used in the Book. We are never troubled about ordination in reading the Book until we reach Tit. 1: 5, where Paul is giving directions to a young evangelist to ordain elders. Not understanding what is meant, immediately, we recur to the appointment of the seven at Jerusalem, and then conclude that all the apostles did on that occasion was an *ordination* service; and so we have fasting, prayer, and the imposition of hands comprising the necessary acts of what is now called "the ordination ceremony."

It is said that Titus in Crete was busy doing these things in the congregations; that it was his especial business, as an evangelist, to have these ordination services. Of all this nothing is taught in the Book; it is a dim, shadowy inference, arising from a misunderstanding of the scriptures and from the faulty rendering of the original into English by the king's translators.

Fasting may be observed at any time by any or all Christians, prayer was and is universal; but the imposition of hands was of rare occurrence even in the apostolic age; and when any reason for it at all is as-

signed, it was never for the purpose of making an officer, but for bestowing a blessing in the gifts of the Spirit or otherwise.

I believe there are nine cases mentioned in the New Testament of the imposition of hands—to wit, the seven at Jerusalem, the Samaritans, Paul at Damascus, Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, the twelve at Corinth, the Ephesians, Timothy, and Paul laid hands on the father of Publius. Others were so healed. It is specifically stated in every one of these, except two, to have been done to impart the Holy Spirit or some blessing. In the case of the seven, the probabilities are strong that it was for the purpose of bestowing gifts of the Spirit. The other case is that of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch. It is quite certain it was not for the purpose of inducting them into office. If so, what office? It is certain that neither Paul nor Barnabas ever claimed to be an officer, nor are they ever called "officers" by any one anywhere in the divine oracles.

As the laying on of hands is regarded by some of our brethren as the most important part of the ceremony of *appointment* or *ordination*, I wish to give this branch of the subject the fullest possible examination in the light of reason and revelation.

It is not denied that hands were imposed on persons called to do important and special service in the churches during the apostolic age. I am satisfied that all those whose services were necessary to the upbuild-

ing and perfection of the saints had hands laid on them. I feel confident that all those who had gifts of the Spirit in any measure, whether they were prophets, teachers, evangelists, or pastors, received these gifts by the imposition of hands. It is contended that the apostles only had the power of conferring gifts of the Spirit; but, at the same time, I am sure the contention cannot be fully sustained. They did bestow all spiritual gifts, and one of these was the gift of inworking miracles, or, in other words, of giving a measure of the power which they themselves possessed to others. But of this we may have something more to say hereafter.

Under the Mosaic institution we have very clearly set forth the manner of consecrating and sanctifying persons to minister in an office. The formulæ of making a priest and inducting him into the office can be seen by referring to Ex. 28: 40, 41; 29: 7; 30: 30. We have that also of making, or consecrating, one to the office of king. (1 Sam. 16: 13; 10: 1.) Kings were anointed with oil. Various other passages might be quoted or referred to, showing what was done to make officers under the Mosaic law. I know of no case in which hands were laid on any one to make him an officer, either under the law or under Christ. Hands were laid on under both institutions.

In the account of the consecration and sanctification of the Levites to the priest's office, as detailed in the scriptures to which we have referred above, after

they had been thus sanctified and prepared for their duty, the hands of the assembly of the children of Israel were put on the Levites, and the Levites laid their hands upon the heads of the bullocks which were to be offered—the one, a sin offering; the other, a burnt offering—unto the Lord to make an atonement for the Levites. (Num. 8: 9.) The Levites were not officers over the children of Israel, but were the servants of the priests. While they might perform service in and about the temple before the people and for the people, they were never officers over the people. “Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him.” (Deut. 34: 9.) No one, it seems to me, in reading the scriptures to which we have referred in this connection, will for a moment entertain the idea that the laying on of hands was for the purpose of ordaining or appointing these persons to any office whatever. Moses gave to Joshua the spirit which he himself possessed. In this case there can be no doubt about the reason or object of the imposition of the hands of Moses. It was that Joshua should be filled with the spirit of wisdom, as was Moses, that he might be fully able to discharge the onerous and responsible duties soon to fall on him as a leader of a great people into the promised land.

Our contention is that the laying on of hands is no part of the so-called “appointment” or “ordination.” While very many of my brethren strenuously contend

for it and believe no one can properly and lawfully minister in the church, publicly, without having been appointed or ordained according to the formula as set forth—by fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands—those who most generally (I might say “universally”) practice the laying on of hands do not hold it as essential; they do not regard it so important a matter as would in any manner vitiate the acts of him who should minister without having hands laid on him.

Of course it will be admitted that nothing essential to an appointment or ordination would be neglected by a high ecclesiastical body or authority in making a bishop. I now make a quotation from Hatch's "Organization of the Early Christian Churches:" "The conception of ordination, so far as we can gather, either from the words which were used to designate it or from the elements which entered into it, was that simply of appointment and admission to office." From this it seems plain to me that consent or sufferance for an elder to teach or otherwise lead the assembly is a sufficient election, appointment, and admission to the office or work. The author goes on to say: "But there is one element which was not present in admission to civil office, and to which in later times great importance has been attached—that is, the imposition of hands. It is, therefore, necessary to consider how far the existence of this rite indicates the existence of a different theory. Two points have to be considered—first, the existence

of the rite; secondly, its significance. In regard to the first of these points, there is the remarkable fact that the passage of the apostolic constitution, which describes with elaborate minuteness the other ceremonies with which a bishop was admitted to office, says nothing of this [the imposition of hands]; nor is the rite mentioned in the enumeration which Cyprian gives of the elements which had combined to make the election of Cornelius valid. It was of importance to show that no essential particular had been omitted, but he enumerates only the votes of the people, the testimony of the clergy, the consent of the bishops. It follows from this that the rite was not universal; it is impossible that, if it was not universal, it can have been regarded as essential." If such evidence as this, given by high-grade ecclesiastics, is not sufficient to show that fasting, prayer, and the imposition of hands are no essential parts of designating any one to do any work that is needful to be done by any Christian, I fear we will fail to convince, especially since there is no evidence in the Scriptures to show, so far as I am informed, that any uninspired man was ever required, directed, or encouraged to perform any kind of ordination ceremonies for any purpose whatever.

Not only did the apostles fast and pray and lay on hands, but others also did, and, as I think I have clearly shown, for a specific purpose, and that purpose is found to have been the impartation of spiritual gifts or some

blessing. In every single case of the laying on of hands reported in the New Testament it is distinctly stated to have been for the impartation of the Spirit or some gift of the spirit or a blessing, except two—one, at Jerusalem; the other, at Antioch—and certainly not at Jerusalem to make an officer or officers; but, as I have said, the presumption is exceedingly strong that it was for the usual purpose of bestowing some spiritual gift or gifts and blessings. The same may be said of the incident at Antioch. But none save the apostles, it is said, could bestow gifts of the Spirit. It is admitted that if any had the power to bestow any spiritual gift on any one for any purpose they must have received this power from an apostle. All spiritual blessings, after the ascension and coronation of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius, must come to man through the apostles—his chosen ambassadors. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles, Jesus being the chief corner stone; hence, whatever we may have, spiritually, comes through their ministration. There is much presumptive evidence that others besides the apostles did have the power of bestowing some spiritual gifts. I am clearly of the opinion that Saul of Tarsus (though chosen to be an apostle to the Gentiles), who had many and various gifts of the Spirit, received these gifts by the imposition of hands, and, in this respect, was no exception to the rule which we

have stated—to wit: After the establishment of the church and the authoritative inauguration of the apostolic mission at Jerusalem on Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius, when the apostles were imbued directly with spiritual powers, spiritual gifts came to others by imposition of their hands. That others besides the apostles bestowed spiritual gifts is clearly set forth in at least one case. It is said in the Scriptures: “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.” (1 Cor. 12: 8-10.) The phrase “working of miracles” is believed to mean the transfer of apostolic power to another; that he to whom the power is transferred may be able to confer gifts of the Spirit. Healing is, in itself, a miracle; and one who heals is said to perform, or work, a miracle. The same may be said in reference to other manifestations of supernatural spiritual power. The literal rendering of the phrase translated “working miracles” would be “operations of works of power.” I understand it to mean the inworking of power—giving power to others to bestow spiritual gifts. It is a fact that the presbyters did bestow upon Timothy a gift by laying on their hands. “Neg-

lect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." (1 Tim. 4: 14.) So here is a plain statement made by Paul that elders did confer a gift of the Spirit on Timothy. They were not apostles. Gifts of the Spirit were exercised by some in all the congregations about which we read. The presumption is very strong that they were not all the direct result of the imposition of apostolic hands; and, if not, then others besides the apostles must have had the gift of bestowing some species of spiritual power on their fellows.

Since the gifts of the Spirit were abundant in the early churches—at Corinth, at Ephesus, in Galatia, etc.—would it be a stretch of the imagination to conclude that Barnabas and Paul really did lay hands on all the elders they appointed on their celebrated missionary tour? Verily, I feel certain that they did, that the churches might have the help and guidance of spiritual power and wisdom. It may be that some of these elders had the power of conferring minor gifts on others, that all might be instructed and that the church might edify itself in love, growing daily in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This they could not have done without spiritual guidance, and this spiritual guidance could be found in no other way than by the mouth of one supernaturally endowed by the gifts of the Spirit.

We now approach the last question, and perhaps the most difficult one to answer in connection with the subject of "The Eldership." We are sure we shall find in the church now evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In the apostolic church often these classes were found to have the gifts of the Spirit—that is, they were supernaturally endowed for the work they were called upon to do. The teachers, evangelists, pastors, etc., we now find in the churches are of the ordinary kind, not one of whom has ever had any special spiritual gift bestowed on him by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, evangelist, or any one else. Whatever men have been in the church or may be now, they have been made that by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The apostles were first to be endued with power from on high; they spoke as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance; they, by the powers bestowed on them, were the instruments by which the Holy Spirit did his work in preparing others to take part of the ministry. It is by the work of the Spirit that Christians are made; it is by the work of the Spirit that elders who labor in word and teaching are made; it is by the work of the Spirit that bishops, deacons, etc., are made.

There is nothing which we have the natural ability to become—and, having that, which we ought to be—but what we may become or be, provided we follow the Spirit, or, as Paul expressed it: "Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. . . . For they that

are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." To follow the Spirit is to follow the Spirit's teachings, given to us by the inspired apostles and prophets of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

HOW DOES ONE BECOME A RULING ELDER—A BISHOP?
HOW RECOGNIZED?

Of course it is understood that I have maintained, and I still maintain, that a pastor, or bishop, in a congregation is an elder who is practically engaged in the work of overseeing. I have also admitted that "elder" is used in referring to bishops and overseers. It is often used in that way, but not always so, as we have heretofore shown. Whenever persons are referred to as actively engaged in the work of ruling or overseeing in the congregations and are designated "elders," then, "elder" means "bishop" or "overseer." Hence, when Paul called for the elders of Ephesus, he called for those who had the overseership, those who were the ensamples to the flock.

But the question as to how elders are to be recognized and under what conditions they can and should engage in overseeing has not yet been answered. It is quite probable that I shall not be able to fully satisfy every one on this part of the subject; but I intend to give as

clear an answer as I may be able to offer, both from reason and revelation. I hope I may not be so unfortunate as to make reason contradict revelation.

I will ask one who knew how elders were made. "Paul, how were elders (bishops) made?" "The Holy Spirit made them." "Is there a different way now?" I answer: No! The Holy Spirit makes us all we are, or all we may, spiritually, ever be; but now we may expect no miracles in the matter, whatever may have been the case in the days when spiritual gifts were bestowed on men. Qualification now is a matter of growth and effort on the part of him who in any way becomes a bishop. We grow up into Christ in all things, and an overseer is a thing some may grow so as to become; but without the growth in grace and a knowledge of the truth, no one could ever become a bishop. Churches, even in apostolic days, had the right, and exercised it, of selecting or choosing persons to serve them. This the apostles at Jerusalem advised in the case of the seven. It is also said: "Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas." (Acts 15: 22.) It should be noted that even the apostles did not in either case presume to act in appointing persons to a work without consulting the whole church. Certainly it will not be presumed now that any uninspired man would assume that he had the right to elect or select himself to serve a congregation

in any public capacity, whether deacon, pastor, teacher, evangelist, or anything else, without the consent of the congregation; much less should he attempt to do so without the approval of the congregation. Whatever service is necessary to the spiritual growth of the members and the edification of the body that any one in the assembly can render, the church may, with perfect propriety, call on him to render that service. The qualifications of the two kinds of men—the elder and the deacon—most necessary to the well-being of the flock have been so exactly set forth that no mistake in making the proper selection ought to occur. “Let them be proved,” says the apostle; “then let them serve.” It is as much the duty of the members to ask their service as it is the duty of those asked to serve when asked. They should take the work willingly, and should wait for no constraint. There are two ways of taking things. One is, when something is offered us; the other, when we appropriate it without consent. The latter kind of taking never requires any outward constraint to cause us to act. There is usurpation in religion as in other things. It is the duty of the church to know them who have the rule over them.

Now, when the members of the congregation are all striving to follow the teaching of the Holy Spirit, then he is making Christians, and of them making churches, and in the churches making preachers, evangelists, pastors, bishops, teachers, deacons, givers, etc. If the

members select the elders, they will know them. The congregation having pointed out their servants in any way agreeable to themselves, they are then exhorted: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God." (Heb. 13: 7.) They are further commanded: "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." (Heb. 13: 17.) If, therefore, they speak the word of God, they, by all means, should be obeyed; but if they should not speak the word of God, then we should neither remember nor obey them. Then, if overseeing in a church be needful, and there is a man whom all regard as having the necessary qualifications and ability, and he is not at the work, the congregation may and ought to put him to work. If they, one or all, wish to pray for him, they ought to do so; and if they have, one or all, any spiritual gift or blessing to bestow, they may, with propriety, apostolically impose their hands, saying, as they do so, as most modern ecclesiastics do: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

No, brethren; there are no offices in the church of God which can be vacated and which may be filled at pleasure by any acts of poor, frail, erring man. "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." There is plenty of

work to be done, and much fails to be done because there is too little personal responsibility felt by the members of the congregations. The great majority feel that there are a few officers who are responsible for all the work to be done, and that if the church fails to do the Lord's work they are in no wise responsible for the failure. The Holy Spirit points out specifically who should do the work of the bishops, and also exhorts the members of the church to recognize them in their work. No one may rightfully assume to himself the work of a bishop in the assembly of the saints; but of his own desire, by the sufferance or approval of the brethren, or by their request or their desire for him to actively engage in the work being known to him, he would be fully authorized by both the church and, therefore, by God to exercise himself in the work of a bishop, overseer, teacher, and leader among the members of the church of God.

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2: 15), is an exhortation applicable to all teachers, whether evangelists or elders. Preparation for work in the vineyard of the Lord depends very largely upon our own efforts. The Scriptures thoroughly furnish the man of God to every good work. To "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3: 18), is the duty of all; and this cannot be done without studying the Scriptures, for they contain all the truth we

may be able to know. The opinions of men, when not in harmony with the truths of the Bible, are not only valueless, but exceedingly hurtful when followed. Nothing can be done in religion without faith, and that faith must be in God's revelation, and not in man's philosophy. "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor. 2: 4, 5.)

CONCLUSION.

We have now examined the subject of the "Eldership" in all of its relations to the church, as we believe, in the light of the Scriptures. The conclusions which we have reached are:

1. That those who are older and more experienced among Christians are, as a class, elders.
2. Of this class, those who are actively engaged, as the Scriptures direct, in the work of shepherding the flock, are pastors, or bishops.
3. Their qualifications are so plainly set out that in finding and recognizing them there is no room for mistake.
4. The work of the elders or bishops is to lead the flock, to be ensamples, to take the oversight, etc.
5. They are not officers, but are servants and workers in the congregations. There are no offices in the con-

gregations which can be vacated and filled at the pleasure of any man; there is no divine warrant for calling any Christian worker an "officer."

6. We have failed to find "ordain" in any literal translation of the Scriptures; therefore, there can be no ceremony or ordination; and elders should not be ordained after the manner of the so-called "orthodox churches."

7. Elders should be appointed or set to work as overseers, but there is no ceremony of appointment to be observed so far as the Scriptures teach.

8. So far as we have been able to learn, the object of laying on hands under both the law and Christ was for the purpose of bestowing something, and that something was not *office*.

9. Congregations should look out among the seniors the men who have the qualifications for the work of bishops, or pastors, and offer them the service, which they should take without further constraint.

10. The Holy Spirit has chosen the men for his work by giving their qualifications; and when the congregations follow the Spirit, they will not select some one not approved of the Spirit for any service in the churches.

Now, my dear reader, I have completed a cherished work. I have attempted to set before you the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject of the "Eldership." I am conscious of having said nothing for the purpose of controversy. I desire the pure, unadulter-

ated teaching of the word of God on this as well as on all subjects that pertain to spiritual life and light. In order to see the truth on any subject of controversy we must get out of the fog of prepossession. The changes made in the translation of words and passages in the King James Version will not be called in question by scholars, nor will any one competent to know a true translation accuse us of being necessitated to thus change the translation to support a preconceived and unscriptural theory in reference to the subject of the "Eldership." Examine the word of God and see whether what I have said is true; seek the truth without prepossession or prejudice, as only it can make us free indeed; and may the good Lord enable us to see the truth and to embrace it, that it may lead us in the paths of peace and righteousness, and thus to the home of the blessed.

JAMES E. SCOBEE.



