

## PERPETUAL APOSTOLIC INSTITUTIONS.

Of necessity, the preaching of the gospel must precede all possible action for the teaching of those who are thus called out from the world. Because of this priority some seem to reckon gospel preaching the supremely important apostolic institution, and that therefore the chief, if not sole, object of the church's existence is to evangelize the world. We cannot but question this view when we examine the conduct of the apostles, coupled with the abundant and special provision made for the edification of the church.

"When the Lord ascended on high he gave gifts unto men...for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ, till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we may be no longer children." Eph. 4:7-16.

The teaching of this oracle convinces us of two things: – First that the service of those several gifts was for one main object – "the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry;" and second, that the purpose of that ministry was for "the building up of the body of Christ." A great work was to be done, and the spiritual "gifts" speedily or instantaneously prepared men for that work. But this rapid preparation of the men did not necessarily imply that their work was speedily done – it was a life-long labor, and ever permitted the exercise of patience, forbearance and prudence. The teaching of the apostle in 1 Cor. 14. shows how, in a church company richly endowed with these "gifts," it was necessary to be cautious in the use of the special capacities, in order to the general good of the whole. First, the service was to be intelligible – "let him that speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret;" then it was to be respectful to one another, for "if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence, for ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may be comforted:" and again,

all was to be "done decently and in order." However great the variety – though "psalm, teaching, revelation, tongue, and interpretation" crowded upon each other, this order was possible, because "the spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets," and we may presume that the exercise of all other gifts were equally under personal control. The "word of wisdom," "the word of knowledge," and the discerning of spirits" – appearing in the spiritual category of 1 Cor. 12 – were also gifts to be exercised in the church; finding their most evident scope among the brethren. And thus we have a very abundant provision made for the teaching of those who had put on Christ.

But teaching is not a sufficiently comprehensive word to use in defining this work in the Church; rather say Edification; that is, building up. The man who essays the building of a house for himself and his goods, has not only to select his material, but to rear it after a definite plan and on correct architectural principles; else, if his house do not tumble about his ears, it may perhaps be a laughing stock to all gazers. How much more important is the building up of "the house of God." And though the master builders may lay the foundation ever so well, there is still great care and much wisdom needed in the superstructure.

In the Scriptures there are frequent references to the style of building necessary – as to quality (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15). The "gold, silver and costly stones" contrasting favorably with the "wood, hay and stubble," which the fire of trial is sure to destroy. As to kind, Peter gives it without a figure in his second epistle, chapter 1, where faith grows into virtue, virtue into knowledge, knowledge into temperance, followed by patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. This is the edifying or upbuilding which results in noble, good, and holy character.

Our own words, *instruct* and *inform*, carry with them the same idea of building; and whether in natural or spiritual things we cannot reckon a man to be properly taught or trained unless he is built up

within – *in-structed*; neither can he be perfectly fitted for all service till he adds to his outward and visible aspect the quality of being *informed* – furnished unto every good work. It is easy to see how good a structure the spiritual house must be when it is built up of such elect, precious, living stones as these.

We presume it was in pursuance of such service as this that Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps in Asia Minor – confirming the souls of the disciples and confirming the churches. (Acts 14:21-23; 15:36-41.) A necessary work; for how else could those who were called to holiness and virtue maintain their stand against evil, and grow up unto Christ?

It is true we lack those primitive spiritual endowments so well fitted to qualify for the building up of the Church; but we are not deprived of their utterances. If the gospel of the grace of God, originally ministered by apostles and evangelists, has been written and "set forth in order" that thus we may be taught what was surely believed by the first disciples; we are no less fully supplied with "the words of wisdom and knowledge" and even much of "the discerning of spirits" of the olden times – all faithfully expressed, not in words and sentences of man's wisdom, but in those of the Spirit of God. Therefore to us most precious; the living oracles and divine testimonies by which we are to be built up, and brought to the inheritance of the kingdom of God. **[R781 : page 7]**

The teaching of those inspired Scriptures is inexhaustible; they furnish instructive lessons and educative provision for ages of disciples and students; possessing a living and growing power like the other works of God, which forbids them ever becoming stale or useless. The Word of God has all shades of power, and every possible degree of fitness. If it is like the thunder blast to split the cedars of Lebanon, it is no less the gentle electric current which thrills in the telephone; a hammer so heavy as to break in pieces the rocks, yet anon so light that its pulsations on the tenderest chords of the human heart can elicit

sweet music; a two-edged sword piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of both joints and marrow, [R782 : page 7] yet so delicate a probe as to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. Wonderful treasure! How can we be poor or void of ability when thus furnished?

Whatever we may be short of in our Church needs for building up; it is a great fallacy to look for help to mere professional teachers. We may not have spiritual gifts, neither have they. We may not be able to show any speciality in our call to particular service, neither can they. They are to be tested simply by experience of their certain or probable utility. Are churches better taught by hirelings? Is it indeed likely that they should be? It is easy to compare the real intelligence of churches with or without "clergy"; and always to the disadvantage of the former. And it would not be reasonable to expect otherwise, because for this kind of moral building there is of necessity moral training. Mere faculty of speech, or depth of knowledge, or power of discernment, or even prophetic insight, must be qualified by love of the truth, by faith in God and devotion to personal holiness. No man can know the doctrine who has not done the work of God. (John 7:17.) This was true in apostolic times, and is true to this day. How little are we the better of those scholastic men who affect to be pastors and teachers in the Church of God: hiring out their learning by the month and year, and seeking for preferment to good livings in virtue of their college breeding.

"A peasant may believe as much As a great clerk, and reach the highest stature:" not only in faith, but in church service. Witness the choice of the all-wise Master, when the foolish and weak and base things of the world were chosen to confound the wise and great and honorable; that no flesh should glory before God.

By the good providence of God we have most excellent translations of all the Holy Scriptures, and in addition, have access to a large amount of illustrative literature and biblical criticism calculated to awaken a still deeper and more permanent interests in the meaning

and application of Scripture. And again, the occurrences of ordinary life and the relations of society, in and out of the Church, when viewed through the divine medium of faith and holy life, are instructive and suggestive in the highest degree.

Not everyone is qualified to be a prominent teacher or exhorter in the Church; but everyone may do something towards edification or correction. The most diffident may find opportunity in private; and, indeed, in the family of God, where all are closely knit together, there never fail times and occasions when a quiet word, an earnest appeal, or a friendly remonstrance may be used. Where everyone has access to the divine library, all may be wise; and who is there to forbid the loving and hearty service of the humblest in the Church?

The whole drift of the apostolic exhortation and teaching is toward universal, personal interest. They were to speak to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; they were to examine themselves, to confess their faults one to another, and to pray one for another; they were to build up one another in their most holy faith; and was there an urgent call for help, they were all to contribute according as God had severally prospered them. Now if this spontaneous and general ministry was the rule in early times when they were so beholden to spiritual gifts and spiritual guidance, and before the copious Scriptures of the Apostles were written out, surely we should be no less energetic in the cordial exercise of every power. The counsels of divine wisdom sound down the long ages, and demand attention at this hour. Only when they are faithfully attended to, can the Church be built up, and subsist as the pillar and ground of the truth.

– *G. Dowie, in Messenger.*

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