

THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

THEIR CALLING, OFFICE AND AUTHORITY.

"Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve?"
– John 6:70.

RECOGNIZING our Lord Jesus as the divinely appointed and worthy head of the Church, which is his body, let us mark with what deep concern and wise forethought he considered all the interests of that body, even to the end of the Gospel age – the period of the Church's probation.

Immediately after his forty days of meditation and peculiar temptation in the wilderness, we find our Lord preaching the gospel of the coming kingdom; and from among those who heard him gladly, with hearing of faith, and who became his disciples, he made choice of twelve men to be the apostles of the new dispensation. These were men from the humbler walks of life: Four were fishermen; one was of the despised publicans; the callings of the others are not mentioned.

Concerning this choice of the twelve, we learn that, while under various circumstances the Lord called each individually to forsake all and follow him, which they promptly did, (See Matt. 4:17-22; Mark 1:16-20; 3:13-19; Luke 5:9-11.) there was also a special occasion upon which he dedicated them to their office as apostles. Of this Luke gives an account, saying that prior to this event our Lord withdrew to a mountain to pray – evidently to take counsel of God with reference to the interests of the prospective Church; and that he continued all night in prayer – "And when it was day, he called unto him his *disciples* [Greek, *mathetas*, learners or pupils]; and *of them* he chose *twelve*, whom also he named *apostles* [*apostolos* – ones sent forth]." – Luke 6:12,13. Thus the twelve

were marked as a distinct and separate class among the Lord's disciples. Verse 17 also makes the distinction very clear between these twelve and the other disciples.

The other disciples, not so chosen, were also beloved of the Lord, and were doubtless in full sympathy with this appointment, recognizing it as in the interests of the work in general. And in making the choice the Lord doubtless took cognizance, not only of the willingness of heart on the part of these twelve, but also of the circumstances and fitness of the individuals for the pioneer work that was before them. Thus, for instance, when he called the sons of Zebedee to leave all and follow him, he did not call their father. The following was to be, not merely a mental following of his doctrines, etc., but the leaving of business, home, friends, and earthly plans and prospects, etc., to go about with him or under his direction in the work of the Lord.

That our Lord at that time revealed much of the great importance attaching to his solemn setting apart of the twelve, is not at all probable, as it would have been impossible for them to comprehend it then; but these dear brethren, chosen from the humbler walks of life to be the Lord's special ambassadors, appreciated their privilege, notwithstanding the facts that privation and persecution would certainly be their immediate reward, and that the reward **[R1521 : page 132]** of the future could not then be clearly discerned.

Our Lord's object in selecting the twelve at that time was that he might begin with them a course of instruction and training which would fit them for their future work as apostles; for they did not fully enter upon that work until after the day of Pentecost. After their ordination the twelve were fully under the Lord's direction and much in his company; and they were careful students of his character, his gospel and his methods.

THE COMMISSION OF THE APOSTLES.

The commission of the apostles was, in the main, the same as the commission of the Lord and of the whole Church. It was to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. (Compare Isaiah 61:1,2; Luke 4:17-21; Matt. 10:5-8; Mark 3:14,15; Luke 10:1-17.) And to this work they zealously devoted themselves during the time of the Lord's presence with them, as well as subsequently; though we are not informed that their success in the work was any more marked during that time than was that of the seventy whom the Lord also appointed to this ministry, though not to the apostleship. (Luke 10:17.) But in addition to this general commission to preach the gospel of the kingdom, the Lord by and by showed the twelve that he was preparing them for a special work in the future – that they were to be *his witnesses* to bear testimony of him after his death. They must be witnesses, too, upon whom the people could rely as having been with him from the beginning of his ministry, and therefore manifestly acquainted with his doctrine and purpose. (John 15:27; Luke 24:48.) And not only so, but these twelve were also chosen to become, under divine providence, the founders and special teachers of the gospel Church, when in due time they should be endued with power from on high.

In other words, our Lord's object in selecting or ordaining these twelve was to so train and empower them, and to so establish their testimony concerning the truth of God, that, through them, such as hunger and thirst after righteousness might be convinced of the truth, and that from among such "a people for his name" (a bride for Christ – a Church) might be selected, trained and prepared for their exaltation as "joint-heirs with Christ" in his kingdom. This purpose in the selection of the twelve was implied in the prayer of our Lord just prior to his crucifixion (See John 17:6-9,20,21) – "I have manifested thy name unto the men [the apostles] which thou gavest me out of

the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them to me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee; for [R1522 : page 132] I have given unto them the words [the doctrine] which thou gavest me, and they have received them....I pray for them: I pray not for world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine....Neither pray I for these [apostles] alone, but for them also which *shall believe* on me *through their word* [the entire gospel Church – to the end of the age]: that *they all* may be one [in heart and purpose and love], as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be *one in us* [and then he shows the ultimate purpose of this selection, both of the apostles and of the entire body of Christ, in the following words] – that *the world* [that 'God so loved, even while they were yet sinners'] *may believe* that thou hast sent me" – to redeem and restore them.

The number of the apostles corresponded to the number of the sons of Jacob, the representatives and founders of the tribes of Israel, which in one phase of their typical character stood for the entire gospel Church, and in another for the whole world. (See *Tabernacle Shadows*.) And in the Book of Revelation these apostles are designated as the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem, the glorious Church. (Rev. 21:14; Eph. 2:20,21.) Just so the foundation which sustains the Church is designed ultimately to sustain the whole world. But if these foundation stones were laid in the sand, the building reared upon them would be very insecure, and could not stand forever. (Matt. 7:25-27.) But they were not laid in the sand, but upon the sure and steadfast rock, Christ Jesus. – Matt. 16:16-18; 1 Pet. 2:4-8.

While all of the twelve were chosen early in the Lord's ministry that they might be his witnesses, [R1522 : page 133] because they had been with him from the beginning, when

one of them (Judas) dropped out, having proved a traitor to his trust, the Lord supplied his place with Paul, who was made a witness of his glory after his resurrection and ascension. (Acts 26:13; 1 Cor. 15:8.) And thus the testimony, of the eleven eye and ear witnesses of the Lord's ministry, death and resurrection, and of the twelfth as to his glorious exaltation, is a firm foundation for the faith of the whole Church, to the end of the age. The election of Matthias by the eleven, to fill the place of Judas (Acts 1:23-26), was simply a human error – an over-officiousness on their part to attend to the Lord's business without his direction. It was done previous to the day of Pentecost and the descent of the holy Spirit. The eleven chose two, and asked the Lord to take his choice of them, and indicate the same by directing upon which the lot should fall. Of course the lot must fall upon one of them; but that was no indication of the Lord's will; and the Lord simply ignored their choice and in due time indicated his own in the election of Paul. And in his subsequent Revelation he describes *twelve* foundation stones in the New Jerusalem, *not thirteen*. Matthias was probably a very excellent brother; but he was not an apostle.

But, we inquire, What evidence is there that these twelve ordinary men were ordained to fill the important office of apostles in the Church? True, we see that, after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, the apostles were the strength and consolation of the infant Church. Having been the constant companions and disciples of the Lord, and eye-witnesses of his miraculous power, and having proved their loyalty and faithfulness to him by bearing his reproach with him, very naturally the saints of their day found in them props for their faith; and they rested upon their teaching, took courage from their example and wisely heeded their counsel. But were they ever intended to be more than such helps? – were they ever intended to be authoritative teachers whose words, more than those of others, would express the divine mind?

We answer, Yes; and the Lord clearly indicates that he would have the Church so regard them, and the helpful service he purposed to have them perform for the entire body of the Anointed. Let us hear the testimony: –

(1) As already noted, we have seen that these men were specially called and solemnly ordained, as a class distinct and separate from the other disciples, and given a particular and significant name – the apostles – to distinguish them from the others.

(2) We have also noticed that, although during our Lord's earthly ministry the work of the apostles differed nothing from that of "the seventy," nor were their labors any more signally blessed (Luke 9:6; 10:17), yet they were more directly and continually under his training, and that either some or all of them were the chosen witnesses of every remarkable feature and event of his course during the three and a half years of his ministry. They were the witnesses of his teachings and of his personal character and manner of life; and of his miracles and the effects of his teachings and work in his day. They were the only ones invited to partake with him of the last Passover Supper, and to receive the instructions of that solemn hour with regard to its typical significance and with regard to the changed features of that institution which would make it commemorative thenceforth of the real Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. They were the witnesses of the agonies of Gethsemane and of his betrayal and arrest, as well as of his calm submission to the fate which he knew awaited him. They were the witnesses, too, of all the circumstances of his crucifixion, death and burial; and also of the fact of his resurrection.

(3) After his resurrection we find our Lord promptly taking up his work just where it had been broken off by his death – the work of still further preparing the apostles, his chosen

witnesses, to bear reliable testimony to the whole Church. We find that while he appeared to many other disciples besides the apostles, and to upwards of five hundred at one time (1 Cor. 15:5-8), he was specially careful to very clearly establish the fact of his resurrection to the apostles. We find him carefully looking up each one of "the eleven" – sending the women **[R1522 : page 134]** who were first at the sepulcher to communicate the fact of his resurrection to each of them, and specially mentioning Peter, lest he should be overcome with discouragement on account of his previous unfaithfulness (Mark 16:7); opening the understanding of the two (Luke 24:27,32) on the way to Emmaus; satisfying doubting Thomas with tangible evidence; specially re-affirming Peter's commission; and fully convincing all and sending them out into the work again. – John 20:26-28; 21:15-17; Acts 1:1,2; Luke 24:52.

(4) We find further that "the eleven" were the chosen witnesses of the Lord's ascension, and that there is no evidence of the presence of any others on that occasion. Compare Acts 1:1-13, specially noticing verses 2,4,9,11. The expression, "Ye men of Galilee" signified "the eleven," all of whom were Galilaeans. See also Luke 24:48-51 and Matt. 28:16-19.

The apostles were thus the special witnesses of the Lord's resurrection, although he was seen by others; and thus the Lord made sure of having in them competent witnesses, that our faith in their testimony might be clearly established. Peter says, "And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly, *not to all the people*, but UNTO WITNESSES CHOSEN BEFORE OF GOD, even TO US, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded

us to preach unto the people," etc. – Acts 10:39-43. See also Acts 13:31; 1 Cor. 15:3-8.

(5) We see that, while the testimony of the apostles was at first restricted to the Jews, the Lord, after his resurrection, taught them that repentance and remission of sins must be "preached in his name *among all nations, beginning* at Jerusalem." And then he added, "And *ye* are *witnesses* of these things;...but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high."..."Ye shall receive power after that the holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, *both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and UNTO THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH.*" (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8.) Since "the uttermost part of the earth" – America, for instance – could not be reached and thus ministered to during the life-time of the apostles, it is manifest that the major part of this witnessing was to be done *through their writings* and after their death. Thus they testify to us, and we consider this commission from the Lord to them to do so, and the particular training they received from him, as the best possible endorsement of their testimony and guarantee of its reliability.

(6) In obedience to the command to wait for the promised power, the apostles and the other disciples, about a hundred and twenty in number, tarried in Jerusalem, assembling together in an upper room, and waiting in prayerful expectancy from day to day until the day of Pentecost brought the promised blessing – the "power from on high," the baptism of the holy spirit. (Acts 1:14.) In this great blessing, specially promised to the apostles, apparently all of the faithful souls present with them shared. "They were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." However, from Acts 2:7 it would appear that "the eleven" (all of whom were Galilaeans) were the public speakers. It evidently brought

to their minds clearer visions of divine truth, filling their hearts with joy and praise; so that out of the abundance of their hearts they spoke the wonderful words of life as the Spirit miraculously gave them utterance in the various languages of the peoples represented there. And as a result of that power [R1523 : page 134] three thousand souls were converted that day. While all of the faithful waiting ones shared the special outpouring of the Spirit that day, and the same Spirit was also poured out upon the Gentiles later (Acts 10:44-47), and has continued with all the consecrated and faithful ever since, we are particularly assured that all of "the eleven" were there, and that not one of them failed to receive this gift of the Spirit without which their apostleship could not be recognized. – See Acts 1:13,14; 2:1.

(7) Although it may seem remarkable that the Lord permitted a Judas to appear among [R1523 : page 135] the apostles, while Saul of Tarsus verily thought he was doing God service as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and was permitted to remain in ignorance of the truths of the new dispensation until all the privileges of the Lord's presence and personal instruction, etc., and even the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which the others enjoyed, were entirely past, there was in this also, as we are now privileged to view it, another master-stroke of wise policy; for Paul was made a witness of the Lord's glory – "as one born out of due time" – as one "born from the dead" before the time – before the time for the Church's exaltation and glory, when, being made like the Lord, they shall see him as he is. (1 Cor. 15:8; 1 John 3:2.) And in visions and revelations the Lord more than made up to Paul what he lacked to make him a competent and reliable witness to us. – 2 Cor. 12:1-4,7; Gal. 1:11,12; 2:2.

And when the Lord himself testifies to us (Acts 9:15), "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles

and kings and the children of Israel," that is all the endorsement Paul needed to put him on at least an equal footing with the others, as one of the chosen twelve. In addition to this testimony of the Lord and to the worthy zeal of Paul in bearing witness to the truth, and to the manifestation of the power of the holy Spirit in him, we have also Paul's own testimony concerning himself. He says, "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11,12.) And again he says, "He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision [the Jews], the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles." – Gal. 2:8.

Paul was pre-eminently the apostle to the Gentiles, and the others more particularly to the Jews. Hence Paul has by far the more to say *to us* through his numerous epistles; but in their day "the eleven" were more prominent in the Church than he – Peter, James and John, as Paul says, being regarded as pillars among them. (Gal. 2:9.) Paul was the pushing pioneer, and his work among the Gentiles of his day was by no means a light, nor an honorable task, in the estimation of men. It exposed him to all sorts of danger, persecution and humiliation. And even in the Church his zeal was not fully understood and appreciated; for he had occasionally to produce the evidences of his apostleship, and to remind them, and thus prove to them that he was "not a whit behind" the others in authority and power. – 1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:5.

But let us inquire further as to the office of the apostles in the Church: Is it merely their historic testimony of the Lord and his teachings upon which we are to depend? or was their witnessing to include more than this?

Evidently they were to bear witness to all they knew, and to all they learned under the special guidance of the holy Spirit.

Only thus would they be faithful stewards of that which was intrusted to them. "Let a man so account of us as...stewards of the mysteries of God," said Paul. (1 Cor. 4:1.) And the same intent was expressed by the Lord when he said, "I will make you fishers of men," and again, "Feed my sheep" and "lambs." Again, Paul says that "the mystery [the deep truths of the gospel concerning the high calling of the Church – the Christ] *hidden in other ages*, is now revealed unto his holy [justified and consecrated, and so reckoned 'holy'] apostles and prophets, by the Spirit," and that the object of its being revealed to them was "*to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery* [upon what terms they may have the privilege of fellowship in this mystery – of joint-heirship with Christ], which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God." (Eph. 3:3-11.) And, again, after speaking of how the Church was to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20-22), he says, "For *this cause* [viz., *the building up of the Church*, the temple of God] I, Paul, [am] the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles." – Eph. 3:1.

Thus we see that the apostles were not only to bear historic testimony of Christ, but they were also specially prepared and empowered, through the influences of the holy Spirit, both [**R1523 : page 136**] to discern and teach *the deep things of God*, which they did as wise and faithful stewards of the blessings intrusted to them for the good and edification and building up of the whole Church. "Freely ye have received, freely give," said the Master; and they were careful to obey the injunction, and through them the same blessings have come down to us – even "to the uttermost part of the earth."

But still we would reverently press our reasonable investigation a step further and inquire, Are these apostles to be regarded as in any sense *lords* in the Church? or, in other words,

When the Lord and Head of the Church departed, did any of them take the place of the head? or did they together constitute a composite head, to take his place and assume the reins of government? Or were they, or any of them, what the popes of Rome claim to be as their successors – the vicars or substitutes of Christ to the Church, which is his body?

Against such a hypothesis we have the plain statement of Paul – Eph. 4:4,5 – "There is one body" and "*one Lord*"; and therefore among the various members of that body, no matter what may be the relative importance of some, only the *one Lord* and Head is to be recognized. This the Lord also clearly taught when, addressing the multitudes and his disciples, he said, "The Scribes and Pharisees...love... to be called Rabbi; but be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, and all ye are brethren." (Matt. 23:1,2,6-8.) And again, addressing the apostles, Jesus said, "Ye know that those presuming to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them, *but it shall not be so among you*; but whosoever will be great among you shall be your servant, and whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all; for even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." – Mark 10:42-45.

Nor have we any evidence that the early Church ever regarded the apostles as lords in the Church; or that the apostles ever assumed such authority or dignity. Their course was very far indeed from the papal idea of lordship. For instance, Peter never styled himself "the prince of the apostles," as papists style him; nor did they ever title each other, or receive such homage from the Church. They addressed or referred to one another simply as Peter, John, Paul, etc., or else as Brother Peter, John or Paul; and all the Church were similarly greeted – as brothers and sisters in Christ. (See Acts 9:17; 21:20; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor.

7:15; 8:11; 2 Cor. 8:18; 2 Thes. 3:6,15; Philemon 7,16.) And it is written that even the Lord himself was not ashamed to call them all brethren (Heb. 2:11), so far is he from any domineering attitude in the exercise of his lordship or authority.

True, there were "bishops" (those who, like the apostles, had a general supervision and oversight of the work at home and abroad); and "elders" (those older and more advanced in the knowledge of the truth, etc., who took the general oversight and supervision of local congregations – Acts 14:23); and "deacons" (those specially charged with the temporal business matters of the various congregations – Acts 6:1-3); and "evangelists" (or traveling preachers of the Word); but they never used these terms as honorary titles. The conditions of fitness for these services in the Church are clearly set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 4:1-5.

Nor did any of these leading servants in the early Church go about in priestly robes, or with cross and rosary, etc., courting the reverence and homage of the people; for, as the Lord taught them, the chiefest among them were those who served most. Thus, for instance, when persecution scattered the Church and drove them out of Jerusalem, the eleven bravely stood their ground, willing to do whatever might come, because in this trying time the Church abroad would look to them at Jerusalem for encouragement and help; and had they fled the whole Church would have felt dismayed and panic-stricken. And we find James perishing by the sword of Herod, Peter with a similar fate in view, thrust into prison and chained to two soldiers (Acts 12:1-6), and Paul and Silas beaten with many stripes, and then cast into prison and their feet made fast in the stocks, and Paul enduring "a great fight of afflictions." (Acts 16:23,24; 2 Cor. 11:23-33.) Did they look like lords or act like lords? We think not. **[R1523 : page 137]**

Peter was very explicit in this matter, when counseling the elders to "feed *the flock of God*" (He did not say your flock, your people, your church, as many ministers to-day speak, but *the flock of God.*), *not as lords* of the heritage, but being patterns to the flock – patterns of humility, faithfulness, zeal and godliness. (1 Pet. 5:1-3.) And Paul says, "I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men. We [R1524 : page 137] are fools for Christ's sake,...we are despised; ...we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place, and labor working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things." (1 Cor. 4:9-13.) Not much like lords in all this, were they? And in opposing the idea of some of the brethren who seemed to be aspiring to lordship over God's heritage, Paul ironically says, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings *without us;*" but further along he counsels the only right way, which is that of humility, saying, "Be ye followers of me" in this respect. And again, Let a man so account of us as of the *ministers* [servants] of Christ, and *stewards* of the mysteries of God. – 1 Cor. 4:8,1.

And, again, the same apostle adds: "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness: God is witness. Nor of men sought we glory – neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome as the Apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." – 1 Thes. 2:4-7.

Nor did the apostles ever claim a monopoly of the teaching or of the pastoral work of the Church; nor did the Lord ever

intimate that they should do so. Paul says, "He [Christ] gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man – unto the measure of the full stature of the Anointed one – that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, ...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." – Eph. 4:11-15.

God has raised up these various helps, and has abundantly blessed their labors, both in the early Church and all along throughout the Gospel age. But the *prominent* and *leading position* of the apostles, as those *specially empowered* to minister to us in spiritual things, is clearly indicated. The Lord's personal supervision and appointment of the various orders or grades of teachers and helps is clearly indicated by the Apostle Paul's words – "*God* hath set [placed] some in the Church – *first*, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, directors and diversities of tongues." Then he inquires, "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?" etc. (1 Cor. 12:28,29.) No: certainly not; and if we would be led of the Lord we must recognize this order of his appointment – those whom "*God hath set*" in the Church for its instruction and edification. And of these we must always remember that the apostles are *first*, though every member of the body may declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. – See Heb. 5:12.

In recognizing this priority of the apostles we are not underrating or casting any discredit upon the ministry of the other helps and helpers which the Lord provided for the edification of the Church. Thus, for instance, the testimonies of the "evangelists" Mark and Luke and Stephen are as trustworthy

as those of the apostles; for they all had "the same mind and spoke the same things." And to such faithful witnesses whom the Lord has raised up from time to time all through the Gospel age, we find the apostles committing their charge ere they were called to rest. – 2 Tim. 4:1-6.

Thus, when the noble apostle to the Gentiles was about to finish his course, we find him committing [R1524 : page 138] the interests of the work to the "elders" of the Church (the faithful advanced and active ones); and his charge applied not only to such persons then living, but down even to our day. After declaring his own faithfulness as a servant of the Lord and the Church, and his solicitude for the great work, he said to them, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the *holy Spirit* hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he [Christ] hath purchased with his own blood; for I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall [ambitious] men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them....And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified....I have showed you all things how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" – Acts 20:17,28-35.

And Peter likewise exhorts the "elders," saying, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords of God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." – 1 Pet. 5:1-3.

But in judging of such teachers whom we have reason to believe the holy Spirit has appointed in the Church, it is our duty

always to see that their teachings are the same as those of the Lord and the apostles – of the Head of the Church and of those whom he has so clearly indicated as specially empowered to instruct us in the deep things of the divine plan, which were not due to be declared in the days of his personal presence, but which he made known subsequently to his holy apostles and prophets. (John 16:12; Eph. 3:5.) The truth, thus divinely inspired and first announced by the Lord's chosen agents, the apostles, even they themselves, had they fallen away, could not nullify. (But that none of them did fall away is manifest from Rev. 21:14.) This Paul distinctly states in Gal. 1:8-12.

The early Church rightly revered the piety and the superior spiritual knowledge and wisdom of the apostles, and, regarding them, as they really were, as the Lord's specially chosen ambassadors to them, they sat at their feet as learners; yet not with blank, unquestioning minds, but with a disposition to try the spirits and to prove the testimony. (1 John 4:1; 1 Thes. 5:21; Isa. 8:20.) And the apostles, in teaching them, enjoined this attitude of mind which required a reason for their hope, and they encouraged it, and were prepared to meet it – not with enticing words of man's wisdom (of human philosophy and theory), but *in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, that the faith of the Church might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:4,5.) They did not cultivate a blind and superstitious reverence for themselves.

We read that the Bereans "were more noble than they of Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily [to see] whether those things were so." And it was the constant effort of the apostles to show that the gospel which they proclaimed was the very same gospel darkly expressed by the ancient prophets, "unto whom it was declared that not unto themselves, but unto us [the body of Christ] they did minister the things now reported unto you by

them [the apostles] that have preached the gospel unto you with the holy Spirit sent down from heaven" (1 Pet. 1:10-12); that it was the very same gospel of life and immortality brought to light by the Lord himself; and that its greater amplification and all the particular details discovered to the Church by them, under the leading and direction of the holy Spirit – whether by special revelations or by other and more natural means, both of which were used – were in fulfilment of the Lord's promise to the apostles, and through them to the whole Church – "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now: howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you [the apostles first, and through them the whole Church] into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself [independently of me], but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak [R1524 : page 139] [i.e., he will be my messenger to you]...He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine [there is no conflict between us: his plan is my plan, and his way is my way]: therefore said I that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you." – John 16:12-15.

It was right, therefore, for the Bereans to search the Scriptures to see whether the testimony of the apostles agreed with that of the law and the prophets, and to compare them also with the teachings of the Lord. Our Lord also invited a similar proving of his testimony by the law and the prophets, saying, "Search the Scriptures,...for they are they that testify of me." The whole divine testimony must be in harmony, whether it be communicated by the law, the prophets, the Lord or the apostles. Their entire harmony is the proof of their divine inspiration. And, thank God, we find that harmony existing, so that the whole Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments constitute what the Lord himself terms "the harp of God." (Rev. 15:2.) And the various testimonies of the law and the prophets are the several chords of that harp, which, when tuned by the holy Spirit

dwelling in our hearts, and swept by the fingers of the devoted searchers after divine truth, yield the most enchanting strains that ever fell on mortal ears. Praise the Lord for the exquisite melody of the blessed "song of Moses and the Lamb," which even we have learned through the testimony of his holy apostles and prophets, of whom the Lord Jesus is chief. [R1525 : page 139]

But although the testimony of the Lord and the apostles must harmonize with that of the law and the prophets, we should expect them to testify of things *new*, as well as *old*; for so the prophets have led us to expect. (Matt. 13:35; Psa. 78:2; Deut. 18:15,18; Dan. 12:9.) And so we find them not only expounding the hidden truths of ancient prophecy, but also disclosing new revelations of truth.

It may be well here to notice a further claim of that great antichristian organization, the church of Rome, viz., that Peter is the rock upon which the Gospel Church is built, and that to him and his successors, the popes, were confided the keys of the kingdom of heaven with power to open and to shut, to admit or exclude, whomsoever they will, and to bind or loose whomsoever and whatsoever they please.

The scripture upon which this doctrine is founded is Matt. 16:15-19. In reply to the Lord's question, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And the Lord replied, "And thou art Peter [*petros* – a stone]; and upon this rock [*petra* – a rock, a large stone] I will build my Church." Thus, in harmony with numerous Old Testament references, such as Isa. 8:14, the Lord is seen to be the great rock upon which the Church is built, while Peter is one of the living stones in the glorious temple of God built upon that rock, which he had just confessed as the rock of our salvation – the Christ. And Peter himself freely admits the relationship of

all the living stones, himself included, to the great foundation stone – the rock Christ Jesus – saying (1 Pet. 2:4,5), "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, *ye also as lively* [living] *stones* are built up a spiritual house," etc.

As shown in several of our Lord's parables, the Gospel Church is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 13) in its incipient and preparatory state; and its privileges and powers were about to be opened to both Jews and Gentiles. It was really the Lord that opened the door into his Church: Peter was merely the agent chosen to do the work in the name of the Lord – opening the door to the Jews in his discourse on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14,40), and opening the same door to the Gentiles in his discourse to Cornelius and his household, three and a half years later. (Acts 10:33,46.) This honorable service is what is symbolically referred to as using the "keys of the kingdom." (Matt. 16:19.) But, the door once opened, neither Peter, nor any other man, can close it. Our Lord declares that he has "the key of David" (Rev. 3:7); and the door into his kingdom will not be shut until the last member of the chosen and faithful Church has entered into its glory – viz., at the close of the Gospel age. **[R1525 : page 140]** The key which Peter used was the dispensational truth then due, and first made clear to the mind of Peter, by the holy Spirit.

APOSTOLIC INSPIRATION.

Having observed with what particularity the Lord chose, empowered and commissioned his twelve apostles to serve the Church, our next inquiry is whether we are to consider their teachings as verbally or otherwise inspired. In pursuing our inquiry we would call attention to the following observations: –

(1) We notice that the promise of the Comforter, the holy Spirit, though it was ultimately to reach the whole Church

through the ministration of the apostles, was specially given to them. (John 16:13-15.) This was given to the eleven on the night of the last Supper, after Judas had gone out (John 13:31); and when Paul, the twelfth, was ordained, it applied to him also with equal force, and was so fulfilled. The promise reads, "But the Comforter, which is the holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you;... and he will show you things to come." – John 14:26; 16:13.

Thus we learn that the apostolic inspiration was to be threefold in its character, consisting (*a*) of a guidance into all truth concerning the divine purposes and plan; (*b*) of such refreshment of the memory as would enable them to recall and reproduce all of the Lord's personal teaching while he was with them; and (*c*) of special subsequent revelations of things to come – of the "many things" the Lord had to tell them, which they were not able to bear until after his death and resurrection and the descent of the holy Spirit. – John 16:12.

(2) Beginning with the second of these propositions – the refreshment of the memory – we think it is manifest that the promise did not imply a dictation of the exact order and phraseology in which they should express those things. Nor do their writings give evidence of such dictation, although this promise is of itself a guarantee of the correctness of their accounts. In each of the four gospels we have a historic account of the Lord's earthly life and work, and in each the individuality of the writer appears. Each, in his own manner and style, records those items which seem to him most important; and, under the Lord's supervision, all together furnish as complete an account as is necessary to establish the faith of the Church (*a*) in the identity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah of the prophets; (*b*) in the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning him; and (*c*) in the facts of his life, and the divine inspiration of all

his teachings. If the inspiration had been verbal (*i.e.*, by word for word dictation), it would not have been necessary for four men to rephrase the same events. But it is noteworthy that while each thus exercised his own individual freedom of expression, and his choice of the most important events worthy of record, the Lord so supervised the matter that among them nothing of importance was omitted, and that all that is needed is faithfully recorded and is thoroughly trustworthy, as evidenced both by the personal integrity of the writers, and also by the promise of the influence of the holy Spirit to refresh their memories. In this connection it is a noteworthy fact that the Apostle John's record supplements those of the other three – Matthew, Mark and Luke – and that he mentions, chiefly, discourses, circumstances and incidents of importance omitted by the others. A glance at the Table of Gospel Harmonies in your Bagster or Oxford "Teachers' Bible" will show this.

(3) Another proposition of the promise was, "He will guide you into all truth" (or "teach you all things" – concerning the truth). Here [R1525 : page 141] we have the promise of just what we see evidenced in the writings of all the apostles; though they were plain and unlearned men, their Scriptural exegesis is most remarkable. They were able to confound the wisdom of the wisest theologians, not only of their own time, but ever since. No eloquence of error can stand before the logic of their deductions from the law and the prophets and the teachings of the Lord. The Jewish rulers and elders and scribes marked this, and "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" – that they had learned his doctrine and caught his spirit. – Acts 4:5,6,13.

We notice that a large proportion of the apostolic epistles, particularly Paul's, consists of such logical arguments, based upon the inspired writings of the Old Testament and the teachings of the Lord. And those who have partaken of the same

spirit, by following the lines of argument they thus present, are led by them to the same truthful conclusions; so that our faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1,4,5.) But in this sort of teaching, as well as in the historic testimony, we see no evidence of word for word dictation, and that the apostles were mere mechanical amanuenses; but, rather, they clearly show that they were filled with a knowledge of the truth and with the spirit of the truth – with a holy enthusiasm to declare the good tidings, which burns and glows upon every page, and which kindles in the hearts of all of God's people the same sacred flame.

(4) The last proposition of this promise is that the spirit would show them (and by implication the whole Church through them) things to come. Thus they were also to be prophets or seers to the Church. Some of the things to come were evidently shown to the apostles by this superior illumination of the mind or quickening of the mental forces – the guidance of judgment – in the interpretation of law and prophecy and the teachings of the Lord.

But more than this was necessary, and therefore, *special visions and revelations* by the holy Spirit were granted to instruct them concerning the things to come. Among these were –

(a) The vision of the coming glory of the kingdom with its earthly and heavenly phases, as seen on the mount of transfiguration – Matt. 17:2-9. See MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. I., Chapter xiv.;

(b) Paul's vision of the third heavens or Millennial kingdom (Eph. 3:3-6; 2 Cor. 12:1-4), which so wonderfully influenced his life and writings, although not due and hence not permitted to be plainly expressed in his day; **[R1526 : page 141]**

(c) Paul's vision of the Macedonian desire and call for his services – Acts 16:9,10;

(d) Peter's vision of clean and unclean beasts, directing him to use the keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19) in opening the door to the Gentiles, of whom Cornelius was the first convert (Acts 10); and

(e) The remarkable revelation to John on Patmos, which consisted of a series of visions, portraying in sign language all the prominent features of the course of Christianity until the end of the age. This partakes more of the character of the ancient prophecies; for though John saw and faithfully recorded these visions for the future benefit of the Church, he himself could not have fully understood them because the seals were not yet opened in his day, and the truths therein symbolized were not yet meat in due season for the Lord's household. But now as it does become meat for the household, the honor of the apostles and the importance of their service for the Church in connection with it will be more and more appreciated by all who partake of its refreshment and strength – other helps and servants being now used of the Spirit in setting forth those truths.

Thus the apostles were divinely instructed with reference to the deep and hitherto hidden things of God. When supernatural means were necessary such means were used, but when the natural means were sufficient, they were directed in the use of the natural means, the Lord always guiding them into *correct presentations of the truths* from which he designed to feed his Church, at the hands of other servants, during the entire Gospel age. Indeed we may rest assured that the divine Word, given or elaborated through the twelve apostles, will constitute the **[R1526 : page 142]** text book from which the world also will be instructed during the Millennial age.

APOSTOLIC FALLIBILITY.

Five circumstances mentioned in the New Testament are usually considered as opposed to the thought of apostolic infallibility, which we have presented foregoing. These we will examine separately, as follows:

(1) Peter's denial of our Lord at the time of the crucifixion. It is not disputed that this was a serious wrong, and one for which Peter was sincerely penitent. But it was committed before he had received the Pentecostal blessing; and, besides, the infallibility claimed for the Apostles is that which applied to their *public teachings* – their writings – and not to all the acts of their lives, which were affected by the blemishes of their "earthen vessels," marred by the fall in which all of the children of Adam suffered – which blemishes are forgivable through the merit of Christ's righteousness. The Apostolic *office* for the service of the Lord and the Church was something apart from the mere weaknesses of the flesh. It did not come upon perfect but upon imperfect men. It did not make their thoughts and actions perfect, but over-ruled those thoughts and actions, so that the teachings of those twelve are infallible. And this is the kind of infallibility now claimed for the popes – that when a pope speaks *ex-cathedra*, or officially, he is over-ruled of God, and not permitted to err. This they claim as apostles – claiming that they possess apostolic office and authority. But all this is contradicted by various Scriptures: twelve alone were chosen, and not in succession, but at once (Luke 6:13-16); and when one failed and another took his office (Acts 1:26), there were still but twelve; and the last pages of inspiration show us that only the teachings of the *twelve* are foundations for the faith of the Church, or will be recognized as such in the New Jerusalem.

(2) The fact that Peter "dissembled" or acted in a two-faced manner on one occasion, in dealing with Jews and Gentiles, is

pointed to as proof that the apostles were "men of like passions" as others, and were not infallible in conduct. Again we concede the charge, and find that the apostles conceded this (Acts 14:15); but we repeat that these human weaknesses were not permitted to mar their work and usefulness as apostles – as those who preached the gospel with the holy spirit sent down from heaven (1 Pet. 1:12; Gal. 1:11,12) – not with man's wisdom but with the wisdom from above. (1 Cor. 2:5-16.) And this error of Peter God at once corrected, through the Apostle Paul, who kindly but firmly "withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." (Gal. 2:11.) And it is quite noticeable that Peter's two epistles show no trace of wavering on the subject of the equality of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, nor any fearfulness in acknowledging the Lord.

(3) The Lord left the apostles in uncertainty respecting the time of his second coming and kingdom – simply telling them and all to *watch*, that when due they might know and not be in darkness on the subject, as the world in general will be. It is manifest, too, that the apostles rather expected the second advent and kingdom within the first or second centuries; but their lack of knowledge on this subject has in no wise marred their writings, which, under divine direction, made no such statements, but on the contrary declared – "that day *cannot come, until* there come a great apostasy, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" – Antichrist. – 2 Thes. 2:3.

(4) Paul, who wrote, "I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing" (Gal. 5:2), caused Timothy to be circumcised. (Acts 16:3.) And we are asked, Did he not thereby teach falsely, and in contradiction to his own testimony? We answer, No: Timothy was a Jew, because his mother was a Jewess (Acts 16:1); and circumcision was a national custom amongst the Jews, which began *before* the Law of Moses and which was continued after Christ had "made an

end of the Law, nailing it to his cross." Circumcision was given to Abraham and his seed, four hundred and thirty years before the Law was given to Israel as a nation at Mount Sinai. Peter was designated the apostle to the circumcision (*i.e.*, to the Jews), and Paul, the apostle to the uncircumcision (*i.e.*, to the Gentiles). – Gal. 2:7,8. [R1526 : page 143]

Paul's argument of Gal. 5:2 was not addressed to Jews. He was addressing Gentiles, whose only reason for desiring or even thinking about circumcision was that certain false teachers were confusing them, by telling them that they must keep the Law Covenant, as well as accept Christ – thus leading them to ignore the new Covenant. In Gal. 5:2, Paul shows them that for them to be circumcised (*for any such reason*) would be a repudiation of the New Covenant, and hence of the entire work of Christ.

That Paul found no objection to Jews continuing their national custom of circumcision is evident from his words in 1 Cor. 7:18,19, as well as in his course with Timothy. Not that it was *necessary* for Timothy or any other Jew to be circumcised, but that it was not improper, and that, as he would be going amongst Jews to a considerable extent, it would be to his advantage, giving him the confidence of the Jews. But we see Paul's steadfast resistance, on this subject, when some who misconceived the matter sought to have Titus circumcised – a full-blooded Greek. – Gal. 2:3.

(5) The account of Paul's course, recorded in Acts 21:20-26, is reflected upon as being contrary to his own teachings of the truth. It is claimed that it was because of wrong doing in this instance that Paul was permitted to suffer so much as a prisoner and was finally sent to Rome. But such a view is not borne out by Scripture-stated facts. The record shows that throughout this entire experience Paul had the sympathy and approval of all the other apostles, and, above all, the Lord's continued favor. His

course was at the instance of the other apostles. It was testified to him by prophecy, before he went to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14), that bonds and imprisonment awaited him; and it was in obedience to his convictions of duty that he braved all those predicted adversities. And when in the very midst of his trouble, we read, "The Lord stood by him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou *hast testified of me in Jerusalem*, so must thou bear witness also at Rome"; and later we find the Lord again showing him favor, as we read, "There stood by me the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." (Acts 23:11; 27:23,24.) In view of these facts, we must seek an understanding of Paul's course in correspondence with his uniformly bold and noble course – esteeming very highly the work and testimony which God not only did not reprove, but on the contrary approved.

Coming then to the examination of Acts 21:21-27, we notice (verse 21) that Paul had not taught that *Jewish* converts should not circumcise their children; nor did he repudiate the Mosaic law – rather, he honored it, by pointing out the greater and grander realities which Moses' law so forcibly typified. So far, therefore, from repudiating Moses, he honored Moses and the Law, saying, The law is just and holy and good, and that by it the *knowledge* of the heinousness of sin had been increased; that the Law was so grand that no imperfect man could obey it fully, and that Christ, by keeping it, had won its rewards, and now under a New Covenant was offering everlasting life and blessings to those *unable to keep it*, who, by faith, accepted as the covering of their imperfections, his perfect obedience and sacrifice.

Certain ceremonies of the Jewish dispensation were typical of spiritual truths belonging to the Gospel age, such as the fasts, the celebration of new moons and Sabbath days and feasts. The

apostle clearly shows that the Gospel of the New Covenant neither enjoins nor forbids these (the Lord's Supper and Baptism [R1527 : page 143] being the only injunctions of a symbolic character commanded us, and they, new ones). – Col. 2:16,17; Luke 22:19; Matt. 28:19.

One of these Jewish symbolic rites was that observed by Paul and the four Jews, which we are now examining, termed "purifying." Being Jews, they had a right, if they chose, not only to consecrate themselves to God, in Christ, but also to perform the symbol of this *purification*. And this is what they did – the men who were with Paul having made, additionally, a vow to humiliate themselves, before the Lord and the people, by having their heads shaven. These symbolic ceremonies cost something; and the charges presumably made up the "*offering*" [R1527 : page 144] of money – so much for each, to defray the expenses of the Temple.

Paul never taught the Jews that they were *free* from the Law, – but, on the contrary, that the Law had dominion over each of them so long as he lived. He showed, however, that if a Jew accepted Christ, and became "*dead with him*," it settled the claims of the Law Covenant upon such, and made them God's *freemen* in Christ. (Rom. 7:1-4.) But he did teach the Gentile converts that they had never been under the Jewish Law Covenant, and that for them to attempt the practice of Jewish Law ceremonies and rites would imply that they were trusting in those symbols for their salvation, and not relying wholly upon the merit of Christ's sacrifice. And to this all of the apostles assented. See Acts 21:25; 15:20,23-29.

Our conclusion is that God did most wonderfully use the twelve apostles, making them very able ministers of his truth, and guiding them supernaturally in the subjects upon which they wrote – so that nothing profitable to the man of God has been

omitted – and in the very words of the original manifested a care and wisdom beyond what even the apostles themselves comprehended. Praise God for this sure foundation.

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said?
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled."
