

DECENTLY AND IN ORDER.

"Let all things be done decently and in order." --*1 Corinthians 14:40*.

RECENTLY, by various circumstances among the companies of the saints, our attention has been drawn to the subject of *order* in the Church. As the numbers of those separated from "Babylon" by the sickle of harvest truth increase, and in small or larger groups assemble themselves together as the Lord directed (*Heb. 10:25*), we find new difficulties and see new dangers arising, particularly on account of the great activity of our ever-vigilant adversary. These have led us again to a very careful consideration of the subject in the light of the Scriptures.

The apostles had much to say to the early Church concerning *order* in the assemblies of the saints; and apparently [R1890 : page 259] we have been rather negligent of this wise counsel, feeling it to be of rather minor importance, because the Church is so near the end of her course and the harvest is a time of separating. But it is safe to continue to heed very carefully "the things written aforetime for our admonition." Though the time is short to the end of our earthly pilgrimage, the issues in the battle with the principalities and powers of darkness become more and more critical, and the contest in every individual case is becoming more sharp and decisive.

While it is true that harvest is a time for separating, it is also a time for gathering. Should the farmer be content to thresh out his grain and leave it scattered on the ground? No; he knows that unless he afterward gathers and stores it his labor will be lost: it will decay on the ground, or the birds will come and devour it. Now the Lord is a wise husbandman, and he indicates that both the separating and the gathering are parts of the harvest work, saying, "Come out of her, my people [separate yourselves from Babylon];" and again, "Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."

We, therefore, that are separated from Babylon are not to stand alone and separate from each other; but we are to gather together in Christian fellowship and communion around the table of the Lord--the harvest table, so richly and bountifully spread for us. "Wheresoever the carcass [the food] is, there will the eagles [the hungry and farsighted eagle class, who discern the food from afar off] be *gathered together*." (*Matt. 24:27,28*.) We are to assemble ourselves together and to strengthen the bonds of love and fellowship, and "so much the more as we see the day approaching." And in so doing it is a matter of special importance that we carefully consider what the Scriptures present as profitable for the various companies of the saints thus assembled.

ORDER IN THE EARLY CHURCH.

In the days of the early Church the printing press was not yet at the service of the truth, and even the manuscript copies of the Word of God were not in the hands of the people; nor had the masses the ability to read for themselves. The New Testament Scriptures, too, were only in process of construction. In course of time the Apostles' letters were exchanged among the congregations and copied for reconsideration and instruction.

Their lack, however, of the things we now possess, was, according to their necessities, made up to them by the great Head of the Church in the various gifts--of tongues, of interpretation, of prophecy, etc., many of

which have now passed away, as Paul declared they would ([1 Cor. 13:8](#)), being superseded by the richer blessings of later times--the complete and compact Word of God in the hands of the people, among whom education has become general; and all the wonderful helps to its understanding afforded by Concordances, Bible Dictionaries, etc., etc.

In order that the meetings of the Church should be profitable in those early days an orderly arrangement of their affairs was enjoined by the apostles, and acted upon by the various companies of believers. Those who had the gifts of tongues, or interpretation of tongues, or prophecy, were not all to speak at once; the unlearned and illiterate women of those days (especially in Corinth--see our issue of July, '93, page 201) were not to interrupt and confuse the meetings, etc., etc. And the whole service [**R1890 : page 260**] was to be characterized becoming dignity, sobriety and solemnity; yet with the greatest simplicity, all, in an orderly way, from time to time, according to their several ability, taking part in the work of edifying and building up the body of Christ. Some had the ability to instruct the Church in sound doctrine; some had the gifts of tongues or of interpretation; some were able to exhort and encourage; and all were able to unite their hearts in prayer and to lift their voices in praise, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. ([1 Cor. 14:15](#); [Eph. 5:19](#); [Col. 3:16](#).) And thus becoming acquainted with each other, they were able to bear one another's burdens, and together to advance in Christian growth and development, their means of edification being supplied by the Lord, and their orderly methods through the advice of the apostles.

While this order in the exercises of their meetings was thus indicated, and was acted upon by the Church, there was also an order in the leadership and various duties of the Church. Thus, for instance, Paul and Barnabas, when they had gathered companies of believers in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, "ordained them elders in every church;" and then, commanding them to the Lord, they took their departure. ([Acts 14:21-23](#).) Paul also commissioned Titus to go from city to city, and in every place to ordain (appoint) elders, whose duty it was to take the oversight of the Lord's flock in their vicinity, to feed them with the truth, to guard them against the wolves in sheep's clothing, and, in a general way, to act as their representatives. ([Titus 1:5](#); [Acts 14:23](#); [20:17,28](#); [1 Pet. 5:1,2](#); [Acts 15:6,23-28](#).) The qualifications of these elders were also clearly set forth by the Apostle--[1 Tim. 3:1-13](#); [Titus 1:5-11](#).

ORDER NECESSARY TO-DAY.

If this order was necessary to the spiritual prosperity of the early Church, and, because necessary, was so authoritatively enjoined and so universally adopted, so that there were no exceptions to the rule in any place, it is certainly a question worthy of consideration whether the same necessity does not exist among the companies of believers to-day.

We believe that the same necessity for order and for the appointment of elders does exist to-day, and for the same good reasons that it existed then, which reasons are as follows:--

(1) Because in the Church, as in a family, there are various degrees of spiritual development. Some are babes, and need the sincere milk of the Word, while others require the strong meat; and it is necessary therefore that some one "apt to teach" should be in a position to do so. There are also various temptations, trials, difficulties and dangers which all are not equally prepared to meet. Hence the necessity of wise and discreet overseers, men of some experience and ability, deeply interested in looking out for the spiritual welfare of all, and capable of instructing them in the truth.

(2) Because now, as then amongst the early Church, there are wolves in sheep's clothing who would "privily bring in damnable heresies," against which the chosen elders should be able to defend the flock; and against which they should be able to arm them by leading them to a very thorough knowledge of the truth. Then, too,

as the Apostle forewarned us, "Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them;" and the faithful elders will be quick to discern and prompt to warn and defend the flock against all such influences. --[**Acts 20:28-30**](#); [**Titus 1:10,11**](#); [**2 Pet. 2:1-3**](#).

(3) Because if no such arrangements and appointments had been made in the legitimate way indicated by the Apostles, some one will *take* the leadership and hold it indefinitely; and almost imperceptibly a whole company will find itself more or less in bondage to that one. Such cases have frequently arisen, and brethren have written to us for some suggestions as to how they might be released without offending or hurting the brother who had taken the leading position.

This taking the leadership has really been a necessity in many cases, and has been undertaken generally with the purest of motives, and with good results up to a certain point; for instance, it sometimes happens on this wise: A brother full of love for the truth and of zeal for the Lord's cause gathers about him a few who receive the truth with gladness, and who desire and need further instruction, which he, being more advanced, is able to give; and together they grow in the knowledge of the truth, and through their united zeal the company increases, until finally it is deemed advisable to remove the meetings from private parlors to a hall. By this time some other brother in the company proves more capable for the larger and more public work, but all fear to suggest that the more capable brother take the lead, for fear of offending the one of less ability, though long recognized and still beloved. In some cases even a hint of such a thing manifests a little feeling of resentment, and it is plain that the brother has come to feel a sort of proprietorship in the company, and he feels and speaks of them as his people, etc., etc., instead of as the Lord's people. But this is not always the case, we are happy to say; for sometimes the grace of meekness continues to grow, and self is lost sight of in zeal for the Lord's work.

Again it sometimes happens that some one who is the most lacking in the grace of humility, and therefore the least adapted to the situation, is forward to take it and anxious to hold it; and if he be not sound in the faith, the company is soon afflicted with speculations or false doctrine whereby many may be stumbled.

(4) If no orderly arrangement exist in the Church, those who are most solicitous for her welfare, and anxious to spend and be spent in her service, may sometimes find themselves in a most embarrassing situation. Faithfulness to the truth often causes division. And some who dislike that faithfulness may strongly intimate that the services of the faithful are not desired, though such might not be the sentiment of all, nor even of the majority of the company. Such a one would therefore lack the support which a full expression would give, and must therefore fight the battle in defence of the flock almost single-handed and alone, or else leave them to the mercy of the adversary.

The fact that things are running smoothly in any locality without any systematic order having been agreed [[R1891 : page 260](#)] upon, or the duties, rights and liberties of the congregation thought of, is no guarantee that they will always run so. Our ever vigilant adversary will be sure at some time to take advantage of every unguarded place or principle in the Church collectively, as well as in the individual members of it. Therefore as a Church, as well as in individual cases, we should

"Leave no unguarded place, no weakness of the soul, [but]
Take every virtue, every grace, and fortify the whole."

The seasons of peace and rest are the times for preparing for the emergencies of storm and tempest, which, both collectively and individually, we must meet. That would be a very short-sighted captain and crew that would put out to sea in a vessel prepared only for fair weather. [[R1891 : page 261](#)] Wisdom counsels that no matter how fair the weather, how calm the sea and how balmy the breezes on starting, the arrangements for battling with the storms must all be on board--the provisions for life-boats, life-preservers, for battening down the hatches, etc., must all be on board. In these testing times especially, when Satan is most active and

subtle in his opposition, we need to look well to all the precautionary provisions that the Lord, through the apostles, has counselled for our protection.

THE APOSTOLIC COUNSEL COMMENDED.

In view of all these contingencies we have no hesitation in commanding to the Churches in every place, whether their numbers be large or small, the Apostolic counsel, that, in every company, elders be chosen from among their number to "feed" and "take the oversight" of the flock. And in accordance with the teaching of the Apostle ([1 Cor. 12:28,29](#)), that God hath set some in the Church to be special helpers, teachers, etc., and that all are not so qualified, we should expect that the Lord will provide some such in every company, and should therefore seek to find them there as in the early Churches. While brethren from outside congregations may help to start the work, and, by their occasional visits, be a fresh stimulant to them, each company should furnish its own elders and carry forward its own share of the Lord's work as the way may open before them. The special field of labor for each company is their own locality, as far as they can extend their influence; and fervent piety and burning zeal among them will not be fruitless. If but little wheat can be garnered, abundant *testimony to the truth* can at least be borne. This Gospel of the Kingdom is to be preached "for a witness," as well as for the gathering out of "a people for his name." Tract distribution, personal visits, personal letters and personal conversation (wise and discreet) --in the workshops and stores, on the streets, and by the firesides-- and backed by noble and consistent Christian characters and kindly neighborly ministries, are all effective means in the interests of the truth, which fervent zeal will not overlook. In these various ways all can preach the gospel; for all the consecrated are anointed to preach, and they need no other authority to do so than that which the Lord gives in their anointing with his holy spirit. For this purpose our Lord and Head was anointed; and this same anointing extends to all the members of his body, the Church.--[Isa. 61:1-3](#); [Luke 4:16-21](#); [1 John 2:27](#).

THE OCCASION OF CHOOSING ELDERS.

We suggest that in the matter of choosing elders the mind of the Lord may best be determined through the agency of his consecrated people. Let the Church (*i.e.*, those only who trust for salvation in the precious blood of the Redeemer, and who are fully consecrated to him) express their judgment of the Lord's will by vote; and if this be done periodically--say yearly--the liberties of the congregations will be conserved, and the elders will be spared much unnecessary embarrassment. If it still be deemed expedient, and so manifestly the Lord's will, there would be no barrier to the reelection of the same elders year by year; and if a change be deemed expedient, the change could then be made without any friction or unpleasant feelings on the part of any.

A vote of the Church merely affords the opportunity to every justified and fully consecrated believer to express his convictions of the Lord's will in the matter--not his own will; for if he be fully the Lord's, he reckons his own will dead, and he realizes that he must act and speak as the Lord would have him do. This method secures to all equal rights and privileges. It was probably the method of Titus and others who looked after the matter in the early Church; for we cannot think they *arbitrarily* appointed the elders without any consultation with the people, who were of necessity better acquainted than they, comparative strangers, could be. This is also the method mentioned in [Acts 6:3-5](#). Remember too that you are choosing servants (ministers) and not rulers or masters. This is very different from the methods in vogue in the various sects, many of which limit most of the privileges to a "clerical" class, who lord it over the people; and even in those things in which the congregations have a voice, the matter is not in the hands of God's fully consecrated, unfettered and spirit-led children, but in the hands of such only as have submitted to a sectarian bondage,

respecting doctrines as well as order, not one-third of whom would claim to be fully consecrated to God. But in order to be sure that we have the mind of the Lord we should make sure that we recognize in the vote only such as profess to be justified through faith in the vicarious (substitutionary) sacrifice of Christ, and to be fully consecrated to him. It might be well, therefore, to identify this class before the vote is taken, either by asking such to raise their hands or to occupy seats in another part of the room. This would help some, too, by keeping prominently before the minds of all that faith and consecration without which none can hope to be of the Church triumphant; and the witnessing of this good confession always brings a blessing to the consecrated.

True, one or a few might not be consistent with their profession, but the *majority vote* would undoubtedly be under the Lord's direction, and the expression of his will; and, in full faith, it should be so regarded. But it might still be urged by some that, notwithstanding their carefulness to have the vote of the Church only, the majority vote of the Church might still be in error, not expressing the mind of the Lord; and the case of the selection of Matthias by the eleven apostles to fill the place of Judas might be cited as an instance of such failure, together with the fact that the Lord simply ignored their choice and subsequently made his own choice of Paul.

This, however, was not a selection by the Church under the direction of the holy spirit; for this was before Pentecost, the holy spirit had not yet been given ([John 7:39](#)), and the disciples were not yet recognized of God as the Church. Besides, none of the apostles were chosen in the same way as the elders of the various congregations, nor could they be: the Church, the body of Christ, was not yet in existence. Only the Head of the Church had yet been recognized, and he had not yet been glorified. All of the twelve were chosen *directly* by the Lord, and in due time qualified for their special service to the whole body. The appointing of "elders in every place" enjoined by the apostles is entirely separate and distinct from the appointment of the twelve apostles *directly* by the Lord, in which matter the Church had no voice whatever, and could have none.

As to the number of elders to be chosen in each congregation: that might depend on the number of brethren in the company qualified for the service. If two or three seem capable, the service of the company alternating among them would serve to develop the talents of each, which might, as opportunity offers, be extended beyond the limits of your local group; and the company would also [[R1891 : page 262](#)] in this way be favored with the varied talents of all. Or there might be one or two whose qualifications might be recognized as preeminent, and such parts of the service might be accorded to them as they would be deemed best qualified for.

The occasion of choosing elders should always be a solemn one. It is the Lord's business, and should be done with thoughtful consideration, as in his sight. The brother who acts as chairman of the meeting should endeavor to impress this upon all. If each one in the company seeks to know and do the will of God only, and, in harmony with his consecration, expresses what he believes to be the will of the Lord in the matter, then, on the strength of the promise, "The meek will he guide in judgment" ([Psa. 25:9](#)), the result of such deliberations should be accepted by all as the mind of the Lord, the holy spirit thus speaking through his consecrated people. Generally the result of such deliberations will be a unanimous agreement.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF ELDERS.

In [1 Tim. 3:1-7](#) [See *Diaglott*] the Apostle describes the qualifications of an elder or overseer, and in *verses 8 to 13* the qualifications of an assistant elder are described. These verses should be read before the vote is taken, and the elder or elders for the chief service should be selected first, and then, if assistants are needed, they should be chosen later. Among these assistants might properly be some sisters; for some of the services can best be performed by females, especially visiting of the female sick. Many suppose that *verse 11* above

refers to these female assistants, as also [**Rom. 16:1**](#); and it seems very evident that in the early Church many sisters did service. The choice or vote should be in full view of the qualifications mentioned according to the judgment by each of the will of the Lord. We quote,--

"If a man desires an overseer's office [service], he desires a good work. [Any service we can render to the **[R1892 : page 262]** body of Christ is a blessed service.] An overseer, then, must be irreproachable [of good character], the husband of one wife [not necessarily a married man; for both the Lord and the Apostle recommend the celibate state as preferable ([**Matt. 19:12**](#); [**1 Cor. 7:32,33**](#)), but he must not have more than one wife, an injunction more pertinent in those days than at the present time], vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not a wine drinker, no striker, but gentle; not quarrelsome, not a lover of money; presiding well over his own family, having his children in subjection with all dignity; (for if a man know not how to preside over his own family, how shall he take care of a congregation of God?"

The idea is not, as the common version seems to suggest, that these servants of the Church are to rule the Church,--to legislate for it and hold it in subjection to their will,--but that, with loving interest, they should *preside* over it, looking out for its interests and affairs and counseling and assisting as faithful stewards of God. (See *Emphatic Diaglott*.) The Lord Jesus is the only Lord the Church needs; and no synods, or councils, or clergy, or elders are authorized to assume the prerogatives of the only Lord and Head. Brethren in the Church may advise and counsel; but in so doing they should endeavor always to speak, not their own opinions, but as the oracles of God. --"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." ([**1 Pet. 4:10,11**](#)) Their counsel should be of weight with the Church only as it is backed by the Word and spirit of the Lord, of which all are to judge individually. But when such counsel is founded on the Word of God, calling attention to its precepts and commandments, it should have the careful consideration of all, in the spirit of meekness. And if, in pride of heart, any despise such instruction, through disrespecting or lightly esteeming the human instrumentality which God has chosen for calling attention to it, the opposition is against the Lord and his way.

It is for this reason that the Apostle urges that we "look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness, springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" ([**Heb. 12:15**](#)); for the grace of God, the favor of God, in manifesting his will by making it plain from his Word, comes to the Church *mainly* through his chosen human instruments. And if any man, through strife or vain glory or from any other motive, seeks to unsettle the confidence of the Lord's flock, and to plant a root of bitterness in their hearts against such servants as the Lord has set for the presentation and defense of the truth, he thereby hinders the grace of God to them, and the result is almost certain to be the defiling of many. Any who pursue such a course are in the Lord's hands for judgment; and, whatever their professions, they will sooner or later be brought to naught, with all who follow their pernicious way. If brethren who are true to the Lord and to each other and the interests of the flock differ in their judgment of the Lord's will, they should differ in love, and should endeavor by prayer and careful study and by earnest endeavor to so purify their hearts from every disposition that would render them unworthy of the truth, to come speedily to the *unity* of the faith.--"Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [in heart, will], be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."--[**Phil. 3:15,16**](#).

"Not a novice [an inexperienced or untried person], lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil [*i.e.*, lest like Satan--[**Isa. 14:13,14**](#); [**Phil. 2:5-9**](#) *Diaglott*--he become ambitious to be some great one, thereby necessitating his abasement; for 'pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall']."

"Moreover, he must have a good report [for honesty and general uprightness of character] of them which are

without [the world], lest he fall into reproach [the reproach of hypocrisy] and the snare of the devil."

"Assistants in like manner ought to be serious, not deceitful in speech, not being addicted to much wine, not eager for base gain, holding the secret of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also be proved first; then serve, being unblameable. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let assistants be husbands of one wife, presiding well over their own families."

In his letter to Titus Paul adds to these qualifications the following,-- "*Holding fast the faithful word*, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by *sound doctrine*, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers; for there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers,... whose mouths must be stopped." How necessary to the [R1892 : page 263] prosperity of the flock are these qualifications in their chosen elders! Above all things they should choose those "sound in the faith," "holding fast the faithful Word," and avoid most carefully those who deal in human speculations and vain philosophies. This caution indicates also that the Church should know positively what its faith is, and be able to judge of the soundness of the faith of its elders. The faith once delivered to the saints ("That Christ died for *our sins*") must test every item of subsequent, advanced truth. And all fanciful speculations and philosophies should be disesteemed and discouraged as saith the Apostle.--[1 Tim. 6:20](#).

APOSTOLIC CHARGES TO THE ELDERS.

Then, when the elders have been chosen and have accepted the service, the charges of Paul to Timothy ([2 Tim. 3:16,17](#); [4:1-5](#)) and to [Titus \(2:1,7,8,11-15\)](#), and of Peter in his general epistle ([1 Pet. 5:1-11](#)), might be read to them in presence of the company, followed by prayer that God would add his blessing upon the chosen elders, and upon all the company as they shall cooperate together in the service of the Lord.

These words of the Apostles are most solemnly impressive. Hear Paul:--"All scripture, divinely inspired, is indeed profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for every good work."

"I charge thee therefore [Timothy], before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his Kingdom: Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season [when it suits your own convenience, and when it does not]; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine; for the time will come *when they will not endure sound doctrine*; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears [for something new and strange--for human speculations and vain philosophies]. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things [against these evil influences and tendencies], endure afflictions [for they are sure to come to all who are faithful in the service: such are sure to incur the wrath of the adversary who will actively oppose them]; do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

To Titus he says, "But speak thou the things which become *sound doctrine*,...in all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, *sound speech that cannot be condemned*, so that he who is of the opposition may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you....For the grace of God that bringeth salvation is manifested for all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ....These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority [the authority of God's Word, not his own]."

Hear Peter also:--"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is

among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint [requiring urging], but willingly [willing to assume the labors and responsibilities of the service]; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind [which loves to serve the Lord, the sheep and the truth]. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder: yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom **resist**, steadfast in the faith....The God of all grace who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion forever. Amen."

THE EXERCISE OF LIBERTY A SAFEGUARD AGAINST BONDAGE.

Some are so glad to be free from Babylon's bondage that they need caution against an opposite extreme--lack of order. Some so fear the enslavement of sectarian earthly [**R1893 : page 263**] organizations that they fear to use their individual liberty to designate which of their number they believe would be the Lord's choice for particular services. They thus risk the very bondage they wish to avoid. The tendency in all is like a pendulum to go to extremes; but the tendency of the Word and spirit of the truth is to "establish, strengthen, settle you." The spiritual interests of the Lord's flock in any place are matters too serious and important to be left to hap-hazard conditions which Satan is very sure to take advantage of some time.

The fact that we have escaped from the bondage of Babylon, is no reason why we should discard all order and system in our affairs: the early Church might have had similar fears; for they had just escaped from the bondage of Judaism, and they were also instructed not to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. ([Gal. 5:1](#).) The yoke of bondage, however, was not the idea of system and order, but the bondage of the old Jewish faith--the Law-Covenant. From that they were to remain free; for Christ, by his sacrifice, had made them free. Evidently the systematic order enjoined upon the Churches and adopted by all was not considered a bondage; order was established and elders were appointed in every place; and the work of the Lord accordingly prospered.

The principle of order and of recognizing elders duly appointed and qualified by the spirit of the Lord--not in so-called theological seminaries--and sustaining them in their work by the approval and cooperation of the company they serve is right, otherwise the Apostles were wrong in enjoining it upon the early Church; and the early Christians were wrong in not resisting the arrangement. But evidently the Apostles and the early Church were not wrong. The simple order and arrangement of their affairs proved a blessing; and the Lord himself established a precedent in acknowledging the arrangement, when, in his revelation to the seven churches of Asia, he addressed his messages through their representative elders, "angels," messengers or servants.--[Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14](#).

We have no controversy with the nominal churches on the subject of order, excepting in so far as they have over-reached the *simplicity* that is in Christ, and the order which he enjoined through his holy apostles, and have *multiplied* the forms of godliness to the extent that they have [**R1893 : page 264**] lost its power. We should not reject anything merely because the nominal churches have it, but we should reject all that is wrong, all that is out of harmony with the Word and spirit of God. Had we been guided by a mere blind antagonism to the various sects, we might have gone to the extreme of discarding some old and valuable truths which the nominal Christian systems still hold in a way, tho now with less and less tenacity. We might,

for instance, have discarded the doctrines of the vicarious atonement, or of baptism, or the Lord's supper, merely because they hold them. But, taught by the Word of God, we have learned to hold fast that which is good; and among the good things is that of doing all that we do in the Lord's cause, as in everything else, "decently and in order;" but let it be the Scriptural order, and not the order of Babylon, which exalts a class of lords over God's heritage and ignores the true Head of the Church, which is the only rightful authority over it. Forget not that "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren; but he that would be greatest among you shall be your servant." "Let all things be done decently and in order," and with a view to the building up of the body of Christ.-- [**1 Cor. 14:40,26.**](#)

THE PREROGATIVES OF THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

It is a mistake to presume that the true Church has no bounden responsibilities, that we are all free to do as we please --to forsake the assembling of the saints if we please, or to associate ourselves with others if we please, or to go here and there and gather a morsel of food from all tables, good, bad and indifferent. If we truly belong to Christ, the only liberty we enjoy is liberty from the bondage of sin and death and all the yokes that Satan would impose upon us. Our freedom consists in the fact that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; we have passed from death unto life, and are no more the servants of the taskmaster Sin. The old things that pertained to that bondage have passed away, and all things have become new. This is the blessed liberty of the sons of God. It is realized now by faith, and in a measure actually; but by and by it will be fully realized when this mortal (blemished and imperfect through the fall) shall have put on immortality.

But having been thus emancipated by Christ from the bondage of Sin, we have since come into covenant relations with him to do his will, which is also the will of our Heavenly Father, even as he also covenanted with God, saying, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God;" "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." So, as our Lord expressed it, we whom he made free from Satan's grievous yoke have taken upon us the yoke and burden of Christ--which is a joyous service. ([**Matt. 11:29,30.**](#)) This, then, is the extent of our liberty if we are true to our covenant; and also the extent of our bondage. Praise his dear name! we find the yoke of our Lord and Redeemer easy, and his burden light, because of his love to us and our love to him.

The true Church, "whose names are written in heaven," is undoubtedly an organization, even in the present time, while it is subject to many vicissitudes--its membership constantly changing, etc; but it is a heavenly organization, not an earthly one. There are two senses in which the true Church of Christ may be considered: (1) The whole company of consecrated believers from the beginning of the Gospel age to its close constitute *one* body, *one* Church, not many; for the Lord established but *one* Church. And over that *one* Church he himself is the only "Lord" and "Head," the great "Chief Shepherd," and "Teacher," and the only authority. This is "the Church of the firstborn," whose names are "written in heaven" ([**Heb. 12:23**](#)); and those whose names continue there to the end of their course, and are not blotted out because of unfaithfulness ([**Rev. 3:5**](#)), will be admitted to full membership in the Church triumphant at the appearing and kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.-- [**2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:7; 5:4.**](#)

The Lord himself keeps the Church books--the records of our names, and the individual accounts of each member: we have nothing to do with that. He enrolls all the truly consecrated believers, and no power on earth can pluck them out of his hand, or blot their names from the records in heaven. ([**John 10:28,29; Rom. 8:35-39; Rev. 3:5.**](#)) His unerring wisdom alone is sufficient for that, and for all the duties of the office of the Head. It is therefore most unbecoming and reprehensible in any member of the body of Christ to become heady--to assume the authority of the Head of the Church. And such a one, if not speedily recovered by the discipline of the Lord, he will eventually cut off and cast out as unworthy of any place in his body.-- [**2 Thes. 2:11.**](#)

(2) Another sense in which the Church may be considered --which also is a Scriptural sense (**Philemon 2; Rev. 2:1**, etc.)--is that of counting a part as though it were the whole. Thus all the living saints may be spoken of as the Church of to-day. Or again, any number of the living Church assembled together in any place may properly be called the Church of that place (e.g., **Philemon 2; Rev. 1:4; 2:1; 2 Cor. 11:28**); for wherever even two or three are assembled, the Lord, the Head, has promised to be in their midst. (**Matt. 18:20**.) The general assembly will be when all the members are glorified with and united to the Head.

If any inquire how we know the members of the true Church, we answer, We know them by their profession of faith in Christ, and by the spirit of Christ manifested in them. It is his truth, and his spirit, and his presence manifested among them, that impels them to assemble together, that unites their hearts in the bonds of Christian love and fellowship, that inspires them with the same hope, animates them with the same joy, and leads them to cooperate together in the work of the Lord. If it be asked, How shall we deal with one who walks disorderly in our midst since we cannot drop his name from a list of membership? we answer, We have very explicit directions on this point. Now, as in the early Church, there are various degrees of advancement among the members, and Paul says (**1 Thes. 5:14**), Some are feeble-minded, comfort them; some are weak, support them; but while patient toward all, warn the disorderly. Do not mistake the disorderly for the weak, and comfort them; but patiently, lovingly, *warn* the disorderly. But after you have faithfully warned such a one, if still he obeys not the truth, "note that man, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Not until it becomes manifest that the Lord has cut him off, may we cease to feel a brother's interest in him.

The Lord also gives explicit directions in cases where difficulties arise between brethren.--**Matt. 18:15,17**.

The great Head of the Church also furnishes abundant means for the edification of his people--for their building up in the most holy faith and their development in Christian character. Then we have his constant supervision and leading throughout our earthly pilgrimage. He is our [**R1893 : page 265**] Head, we are his body; he is our Shepherd, we are his sheep; he is our Captain, we are his soldiers. Now we are the Church on probation, on trial; now we are the Church militant, in the midst of our warfare, hoping by and by to be approved as faithful soldiers and worthy to be admitted into full membership in the Church triumphant, in power and great glory.

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Thus we see how thoroughly the true Church of Christ is organized, under Christ, its Head, even in this probationary state, as we journey through the wilderness to our promised Canaan. We are all under the orders of our great Commander whom all must obey and follow who would reach the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Oh, no, we are not our own, and have absolutely no liberty to do our own will in any matter. All is subjected, even our very thoughts, to the will of God in Christ; and our membership in his Church is made dependent upon our faithfulness in recognizing this and in rendering cheerful, loving obedience. We cannot do as *we* please in any matter: we are strictly under law to Christ, whose holy spirit must rule our every deed and word and thought; and our constant effort must be thus to bring our every power and talent into subjection to him.

In this blessed bondage to Christ, a bondage of love, there is the highest sense of liberty, as, one after another, the shackles of sin drop from us. The world and its ideas and vain ambitions, and follies, and pride, and its superstitions and fears cease longer to fetter us, and the windows of our minds and hearts are thrown wide open that the glorious light of divine grace may stream in, and our hearts rejoice and sing.

THE APOSTOLIC ORDER THE LORD'S ORDER.

Thus the great Head of the Church has marked out our course for us. He has said, "This is the way; walk ye in it." He has prescribed all the conditions and arrangements, etc., and it is our part to faithfully follow his directions. It is to him that the Apostle Paul ascribes the orderly arrangement of the affairs of the Church, saying:--

"And *He* gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of 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 stature of the fulness of Christ." ([Eph. 4:11-16](#).) Here, as in [1 Cor. 12:12-20](#) the Apostle illustrates the relationship of the Church to each other and to the Lord by the parts of a human body: and he intimates that every member is to be nourished and exercised, that the body may be symmetrical, perfect. Again the same apostle tells us, "God hath set the members, *every one of them*, in the body, as it hath pleased him. [Each should seek to recognize the Lord's appointments in his own case, as well as in that of others: and each should endeavor to serve according to the Lord's recognized arrangement, only.]....For the body is not one member, but many....And God hath set some in the Church; first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, etc., etc." We believe that the Lord has faithfully performed his part, all along during the age providing servants in his Church; but evidently his people have not always looked for those of his qualifying and appointing; and undoubtedly they have missed considerable by this failure, and by accepting instead a self-appointed, self-exalted, self-instructed and self-perpetuated "clergy."

There were but twelve apostles, and their inspired ministry has been to the whole Church, even to the end of the age. They had no successors, but the Lord has from time to time raised up teachers and pastors with varying degrees of ability, able in measure to instruct and care for the interests of the flock.

The term "elder" seems to be applicable to any or all of these servants whom the Lord sets in his Church for its edification, some of them having a principal service while others are assistants. Thus the Apostles classed themselves as elders. ([1 Pet. 5:1](#).) The term "elder" would signify an elder brother, not necessarily an elder in years, but matured in Christian character. Timothy and probably Titus were young.--[1 Tim. 4:11,12](#); [Titus 1:4](#); [2:15](#).

If in any company one or more seem to have marked talent for the public presentation of the truth, such ability should be recognized by all, and all should cooperate in making use of it; and special meetings ought to be appointed to this end. Such meetings seem to have been rare in the early Church, as there were not many gifted speakers like Paul or Apollos or Peter. But such talents, when found, were used, and were of good service. So it should be among us. The talent for public speaking may be ordinary or extraordinary, and in either case edifying. The congregations should be the judges of that; and if no such talent be found public preaching services would best not be held, but instead, such other services as would edify more, and for which suitable talent is found in the company.

THE OBJECTS TO BE SOUGHT IN THE ASSEMBLIES OF THE SAINTS.

Note also the objects to be sought in the assemblies of the saints and the ministry of elders, etc. It was not merely social enjoyment, nor to go through a formal routine of service; but it was (1) "For the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry." These assemblies were to be training-schools, in which all the saints might become the more fully equipped for the service ["ministry"] of the Lord--not only the glorious service of the future, but also the essential service of the Church in the present age, by which the bride is to make "herself ready" for the future service. To this end all the saints should be diligent students, and the instruction should be as systematic and orderly as possible, and with a view to thoroughness of development, rather than

entertainment. We remember that Paul upbraided some who were not sufficiently advanced and established for their opportunities, saying, "When for the time [in which you have had these privileges] ye ought to be *teachers*, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God [the doctrine of Christ], and...have need of milk, and not of strong meat."--[**Heb. 5:12**](#).

(2) It was for the edifying of the body of Christ,-- for the knitting of all together in the unity of the faith and of the spirit and in love and devotion to God, that as one body they might advance in the development of Christian character and grace and knowledge toward the stature of the fulness of Christ.

In this view of the object of our assembling together we see that we have a most important work to accomplish. Let us therefore study to show ourselves workmen approved unto God, rightly dividing the Word of truth. It is also in this view of the subject that we have commended the plan of the "Dawn Circles for Bible Study" mentioned in our issue of Sept. 15, as an aid to thoroughness and system in our preparation for service, and as *one* of the means of grace; tho *not the only one*.

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We advise that one meeting each week be held for such purpose, either on the Lord's day, or on some evening during the week. If we really believe that the plan of the ages is the divine plan, the meat in season in this harvest time, and that its times and seasons are of divine appointment, then the value of thoroughness in the study of it, that we may be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us, cannot be overestimated. It is just what all need to arm them for the conflicts of this "evil day"-- these "perilous times;" and for this purpose undoubtedly it was given us of God. In such meetings as these the stronger can be of great service to the weaker in assisting them to put on the whole armor of God and in showing how every scripture that may be brought forward fits into its proper niche in the divine plan, which is one grand, harmonious whole. These and all meetings should always be introduced and closed with worship and praise.

We recommend also a mid-week meeting (devotional and social in character, not doctrinal), consisting of prayer, praise and testimony; the special object of these being the cultivation of the devotional spirit and of Christian fellowship, love and communion. Thus we may exhort one another and provoke one another to good works. A good feature in both of these meetings is the opportunities they offer for all to participate freely and to edify one another.

ORDER IN THE ALLEGHENY CHURCH.

It may be a matter of interest and profit to many to know of the *order* of the Church here in Allegheny. Of course, we have no list of membership, for we leave the keeping of the books entirely to the Lord: He knoweth all them that are his; and we recognize them by his spirit manifested in them. We have preaching, prayer and praise in the German language from 1.30 to 2.30 o'clock P.M., and in English at 3 P.M. every Lord's day, and a general Bible Study in the evening, beginning at 7.30 and preceded by a half hour's praise service.

As we are too widely scattered for a general mid-week meeting, we have seven cottage meetings, in different parts of the two cities, on Wednesday evenings; and several "Dawn circles" are being started on Friday evenings. A number of competent brethren have been chosen by vote of the congregation to take charge of these meetings, and at the end of each quarter they exchange so as to give variety to the companies, and the better to acquaint the leaders with the spiritual condition of the whole church of this place. A few also go out occasionally to adjacent towns to extend a helping hand to other little groups. Our effort being to draw out and develop as much talent as possible in the Church, sometimes one or two names are dropped from the list

at the end of the quarter and new ones supplied, and afterwards those names may be picked up again and voted into service.

In addition to these leaders the company has appointed a number of sisters (ten in all), who cooperate with the brethren in visiting and general pastoral service. These sisters are specially chosen with a view to fitness and [R1895 : page 266] to opportunities of time, etc., for the service. Their work is chiefly among the sisters, while the brethren who lead the evening meetings look chiefly after the brethren.

This, of course, does not interfere with the duty and privilege of all in caring one for another, but it insures a systematic care over all, which might otherwise be to some extent neglected, as all are not so situated as to have time, etc., at their command, and as our time is occupied in a variety of ways which make it impossible to properly attend to these pastoral duties without such aids.

At the end of each quarter we meet together with these representative brethren and sisters and consult concerning the spiritual conditions and needs of the Church here. We are happy to say, also, that no note of discord or manifestation of strife or vain glory has ever been observed among these co-laborers. The work is undertaken and accomplished in the spirit of love and meekness, and the desire to do good, and is greatly blessed to the edification of the dear flock of this place.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONGREGATIONS AND ELDERS.

To those in position as elders in the Church the Lord says, "Be not ye called Rabbi [a great man, a master]; for one is your Master, even Christ, and *all* ye are brethren;" while to the congregation of his people he also says, "Call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye [any of you] called masters [*i.e.*, neither give nor receive titles of any kind], for one is your Master, even Christ."--[Matt. 23:9,10.](#)

No marks or badges of distinction or flattering homage of any kind may be tolerated in the body of Christ. No brother, however efficient or useful, should desire it or receive it from the church without protest and rebuke; and none should so far forget the admonition of the Lord as to bestow it. All ye are brethren--brethren of like passions and all subject to infirmities; and let each take heed that "no man put a stumbling block [to pride or vanity or any other evil thing], or any occasion to fall, in his brother's way." ([Rom. 14:13](#)) Many indeed have been the prominent ones in the Church who have been overcome by flatteries--undue praise, worshipful reverence--arising mainly from the unwarranted presumption on the part of the flock that the elder brethren who minister to them in spiritual things are beyond the reach of temptation or the possibility of stumbling. It is this lack of consideration of the Lord's command that often makes the position of a leading brother one of peculiar peril. It was flattery of the leaders of the Great Reformation that stayed the progress of that good work and caused many of them of understanding to fall from their steadfastness. ([Dan. 11:34,35.](#)) But let it not be so among us: let each strive to shield the other from temptation, and to edify and build up in every principle of righteousness and truth, and in soberness of mind and watchfulness against all the intoxicating influences of the spirit of the world.

There is a vast difference, however, between a healthful, cordial brotherly love and sympathy and warm and grateful appreciation of faithful service, and that unwholesome sentimentalism which savors of the spirit of the world, and which is always as fickle as it is false. The manly Christian will always discountenance everything that savors of worshipful reverence and flattery; and when offered, will say, in manner if not in word, "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant....Worship God" ([Rev. 22:9](#)); but the less mature will often court and receive flattery to their own injury. It is for this reason that the Apostle counsels the choosing of elder brethren of established character for leadership, rather than a "novice." While the Lord arranged that

the Church should have some apostles, elders, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc., he would not have us use any of these names as titles of honor; and therefore, while recognizing these positions of service in the Church, we should always continue to address and [R1895 : page 267] to speak of these brethren merely as brethren--brethren beloved in the Lord.

While the Church is thus guarded on the one hand against the worldly spirit of vain glory, she is equally guarded on the other hand against that cold, unappreciative, cynical disposition which in that envious, pharisaical spirit plainly says, "Give God the glory, we know that this man is a sinner." "We beseech you, brethren," says the Apostle, "to *acknowledge* them which labor among you, presiding over you in the Lord, and admonishing you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."--***I Thes. 5:12,13.***

Again he says, "Have confidence in your leaders, and submit yourselves [*i.e.*, if you, according to the Lord's methods, have chosen the right kind, or rather if you have permitted the Lord to choose them for you in the way he has indicated, as shown above]; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief."--**Heb. 13:17.**

Thus, while the elders are cautioned against assuming to be lords over God's heritage, the flock is also cautioned not to defy the elders, nor to blindly and worshipfully follow them without proving their teachings by the Word of God, but all, in humility and meekness, are to harmoniously cooperate together as *one body* for the upbuilding of itself in love and in all the Christian graces, and for the general advancement of the work of the Lord.--**1 Pet. 5:1-11.**

THE ONENESS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Before leaving this many-sided subject of order in the Church, we would also briefly call attention to the Lord's design that the whole (living) Church, however widely scattered over the world, should be knit together as one. It was so in the Apostle's days, and it should be so still. It is a pleasant observation that, even with their limited means of communication, whenever there was opportunity the churches in one place were prompt to send Christian greetings and benedictions to those in other places (**Acts 15:23; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 13:13; Phil. 4:21-23; Col. 4:14,15; 1 Pet. 5:13; Titus 3:15; 3 John 14**); and all were subject to the same regulations instituted by the apostles, having the "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." Their earnest endeavor was to keep "the unity of the faith in the bonds of peace," and to avoid any schism in the body of Christ.--**Eph. 4:3-13; 1 Cor. 12:25.**

It is noticeable, too, what a beautiful unity of spirit and of faith, and what steady cooperation, there was among the apostles and elders of the early Church. They were all zealously endeavoring to preach "the same things," the "sound doctrine," of the truth of which they were fully persuaded. One was not endeavoring to eclipse another by getting up some brand new patented theories of his own. Apollos was not endeavoring to discount the teachings of Paul; nor were the elders of the various little companies endeavoring to lead the sheep under their care into by-paths of speculation and vain philosophies. No, it was not so, though from time to time false teachers came among them with the evil spirit of vain glory attempting these things, to draw away disciples after them; but the true ones, on the contrary, were faithful to one another, as they were also to the Lord. Paul planted, and Apollos watered, and God gave the increase.

We are glad to say that to a large extent this spirit prevails to-day, and we trust it will more and more prevail, till we all come in the unity of the faith to the stature of the fulness of Christ, as one body under the one Head, Christ Jesus, harmoniously cooperating together in the doing of his will under the direction of his Word, being knit together in love and full of zeal in the Lord's service --the great harvest work.

THE HEAVENLY VS. THE EARTHLY CHURCH ORGANIZATION.

Foregoing we have seen the beauty, simplicity and completeness of the organization of the Church whose names are "written in heaven." Its only ruler and Head, the Lord Jesus, is infallible; God has centralized the authority in his hands, and every one of its members is required to render loving, loyal and prompt obedience to him, not only in their words and conduct, but even in their very thoughts. He admits to membership, and, when needful, he excommunicates the disloyal, and "blots out" their names.

Its members, firmly united to its Head, and thus to each other, according to their degree of development in the Master's spirit of love, are required to recognize as "brethren" all who have this spirit of love and consecration, with "the faith once delivered unto the saints"--that Christ died for *our sins* according to the Scriptures, and that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. They are required to meet together and to edify one another, and to conduct their meetings with decorum and order and to look out among themselves such as the Lord's Word and providence seem to indicate as suitable elders and to give to them their *public recognition* (as by vote for instance) and their cooperation in the service. This Church does not need to organize; for it has been organized since Pentecost; and if a new meeting is started it is only necessary for such to recognize the organization and its Head and his laws, and to obey them.

But how great the contrast between this and an earthly church, organized according to various human traditions! with a self-constituted "clergy" who lord it over the "laity" and divide amongst themselves the spoils taken from the laity--the filthy lucre, honors, reverence, titles, etc.,--from those of the claimed infallible pope down to the "inferior orders of ministers;" only exceptional ones being ministers indeed (servants of God's flock); the majority lording it over God's heritage to the extent that *their* [R1896 : page 267] flocks will permit. Read carefully [Jer. 23:1-4](#); [Ezek. 34:1-16](#).

The bond of love in the heavenly Church is, in the earthly organization, replaced by a selfish bond of sectarian pride and a fear that to die outside an earthly church would incur eternal woe. For the simple but forcible confession of faith in the heavenly Church, they substitute elaborate schism-making confessions and tests. Verily the strength of the earthly churches is in their carnality, and their "laity's" ignorance of the Lord's Word and their individual liberties. The individual faith, judgment and liberty of their members are surrendered to the congregation when they bind themselves with sectarian names, obligations and confessions of faith; and the faith, judgment and liberties of the congregation are in turn surrendered to ruling Presbyteries and Conferences, or to an earthly pope. In the heavenly organization anyone may advise and point out the Word of the Lord; but none can do more without violating the rules and risking his own excommunication by the great and infallible Head of this Church.

The individual liberty of each member of the heavenly Church toward each other member, and the complete subserviency of each to the Lord only are characteristics of the Lord's organization which contrast sharply with those of human organizations.
