

1911 The Gospel Ministry

By William Smoot

“No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” - Hebrews 5:4.

Some years since, concluding in No. 5, Volume vi, of *The Sectarian*, we wrote a series of articles upon this subject, but since the death of Elder Zinn, have felt somewhat impressed to again notice the subject, more especially as many of those readers to whom the first series of articles were addressed, have passed away; and to some extent a new membership occupy the places of those who have gone before.

The subject is one of great moment to us who of all religious orders (professedly Old School or otherwise,) rely alone upon the God of heaven to supply us with ministers.

In claiming obedience to this commandment Anti-means Baptist alone of all religious orders hold to it as a *fact*; with us it is *vital*, with others it is merely *formal*.

The Gospel ministration is *spiritual* and to *spiritual subjects*; it is a ministration whose benefits are confined to the kingdom, hence it is called “*the Gospel of the kingdom*” (Matthew 24:14). It is not a ministration to the world of mankind for this would be “*casting pearls before swine*” (Matthew 7:6). The men (not women – see I Timothy 2:11,12.) who are called of God to the work, are qualified and sustained by Him in their work.

In ordination we simply say that we believe the Lord has called and sent such an one to the work; ordination is simply a *recognition* of the work of the Lord in calling one to the ministry.

In former years our churches have been often mistaken; and we presume that we may be yet in years to come. It is absolutely essential that we pay keen attention to the Divine order and requirements given. It is very easy to move too fast; it is very difficult to move too slow in our judgment of a matter so vital to the peace and harmony of the church.

Unquestionably the church is the judge of the gift of her members (I Cor. 6:3,) as she is moved by the Holy Ghost (Acts 13:2), to separate them to the work, and sustain them in their labour. The testimony, however, recognizes the church to be in the Spirit, her judgment is a spiritual judgment, she does not reach it through the channels of natural reasoning; but it is an exhibition of the Divine Presence, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The mind of the church must be clear upon the Gospel qualifications of a ministerial gift. Those qualifications are given and are clearly defined, relative to the external criteria for the office. (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9). We cannot afford to make a mistake, if it can possibly be avoided, upon a matter of such moment; the time must be ripe for the call (to ordination,) and it will find the church and gift ready for the work. Hasty action injures the usefulness of the gift, by pushing its recipient forward into positions and responsibilities which he is not qualified to occupy.

When Absolem was slain Ahimaaz was very anxious to run with the message but Joab restrained him, sending Cushie instead. So anxious, however, was Ahimaaz to go that he over-persuaded Joab who finally gave him permission, and it is said that he *“ran by the way of the plain and overran Cushie.”* Yet when he came to David he came with a *confused message* of a great tumult; and finally had to stand aside and let Cushie tell the truth; a clear, pointed message, unpalatable ‘tis true personally to David; but the note of signal victory and deliverance to Israel (2 Samuel 18:19-32).

Moses started out some years before the time (Exodus 2:11,12, and Acts 7:25,) to deliver Israel; but when the time came (Exodus 4:1-16,) he was not at all anxious to go. We might add on general principles, that a preacher seems somewhat like a wasp, larger when first hatched out than at any other time.

Paul says; *“If I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then?”* (1 Corinthians 9:17,18.) And speaking of his labour the apostle well says: *“If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 9:2). Here is certainly clear illustration of the manner in which the Lord works. He raises up the minister to the work, assigns him to his field; and seals the evidence of that work, as the apostle again testifies; *“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy.”* (1 Thessalonians 2:19,20).

Now admitting these things to be true let us pass to another very important consideration. The Saviour said on a certain occasion (Matthew 9:37,38,) *“The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.”* It is frequently quoted that *“he send forth more laborers;”* but the word *“more”* is not in it, and to our mind would destroy the force of the testimony. We can depend on Israel’s God to send laborers into the ripened harvest fields, when *ripened*. We dare not put our hand to the ark. But we must wait *“for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: O say more than they that watch for the morning”* (Psalm 133:6).

We cannot hasten the morning’s dawn; we cannot hasten that preparation *“of the heart in man, and answer of the tongue, which is from the Lord.”* *“The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* *“When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb to call me by His grace, I conferred not with flesh and blood,”* &c.

If the vision tarry, *“wait for it; because it will surely come.”* For the vision is yet for an *“appointed time,”* but *“at the end it shall speak, and not lie”* (Habakkuk 2:1-3). Do we think that we need more laborers? This is thinking against the Divine testimony that laborers will be sent under the Divine guidance, and at the appointed time and place. Are we disposed to follow the course of Abraham in an effort to fulfill the Divine promise? Then we can expect a mocking Ishmaelite to come at our call.

The greatest monuments of earthly power and skill shall crumble and fade; the strongest governments of human greatness shall perish; and the towering waves of oblivion shall roll high over the proudest monuments of human empire, but *“they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength”* (Isaiah 40:3). They shall show forth life and zeal, when time’s greatest, strongest powers shall fail; when those whose trust is in man shall perish in the perishing things of time, that man or people whose hope the Lord is, *“shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water”* (Psalm 1: 1-3).

The way over which (personally or collectively we travel) may seem dark and inscrutable to mortal minds; the path intricate and beset with difficult; and infidel reasoning fill the carnal mind; but faith points with unerring precision to the promise of God, and clings in deathless embrace to the cross of Christ.

In His own time and way the laborers shall be sent, bright clouds overshadowing the Gospel church, through which the Lord will speak. They may not seem to our carnal reason sufficient in number, but faith assures us that their number is now, ever has been, and ever will be complete.

Israel's God knows where each and every one is to labor, the extent of their field; and He sustains them in their work. One may feel like Elijah alone, and an outcast; but at the proper time, and in the appointed manner the Lord will reveal His presence, and sustain the work of His hands.

The travel of the church, records continual instances when of our own selves men have arisen *"speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them"* (Acts 20:30). This condition must continue that the Divine order be fulfilled: *"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you"* (II Peter 2:1). And this condition generally if not always arises from carelessness or inattention on the part of the church to a matter so vital: the *ordination of men* to the work of the Gospel ministry. It was with *fasting and prayer* the first seven men were ordained under the Gospel church.

The solemn warning is given in Ezekiel 44:5; *"Mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary."* We must wait upon the Lord *for our ministers, as for our members*; no stress of circumstances can justify an effort on our part to supply the places of those who are called away from their field of labor, or for additions to our numbers.

A church can get along very well without a preacher if she is in the spirit of travail; but she never can get along with one that she has made to order, without continued trouble. *"Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it"* (Psalms 80:12,13).

As the wild boar of the wood will root up, trample upon, and otherwise destroy the most valued treasures of the garden, so does such false teachers trample upon the most sacred rights and principles of the Gospel vineyard.

If Samuel with all of his godly knowledge, Divine zeal, and reverence for holy things, came so near making a mistake (I Samuel 16:6-13,) in anointing Eliab, the noble (from a natural standpoint) looking son of Jesse, as king over Israel, instead of David; how important that we should be careful of the Divine unction in even *licensing*, (first proving) and so manifold more, in ordaining. It was said to Samuel on that occasion: *"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."* The "outward appearance" is frequently deceptive. The "outward appearance" may indicate that we need a preacher in a certain locality; but the fact of the matter may be that this is one of the last things that we do need.

And above all else he must be the gift of God; *“Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. * * * And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:8-12). Each gift is exactly suited to the field it is to occupy; the particular character of the work which it is to perform. *“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him”* (I Cor. 12:18).

It looked very much like Peter and the rest of the disciples (about a hundred and twenty) concluded that it was necessary for them to select one in the place of Judas. They certainly gave the Master a very limited choice placing only *two* before Him, and finally concluded to *decide the matter by lot*, thus they selecting Matthias (Acts 1:15-26) which was the last that was ever heard of him.

The prophet has well said that the Lord’s ways are not our ways; *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,”* is the declaration, *“So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8-12).

A church may be slow, in recognizing a ministerial gift; but will surely come to the right decision at the end, when proper time is given, and she is guided by the Divine Spirit, without which her judgment amounts to nothing. Both the church and the gift can quietly wait, whether it be a matter of months or of years until the hand of the Lord is recognized; *“The Holy Ghost Said”* (Acts 13:1,2).

In a ministry of 40 years we have never heard of either a Church or gift being injured by moving too slow; but we have heard times without number of the church being imposed upon, by going too fast. It is written, *“A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men”* (Proverbs 18:16). Again, *“Lay hands suddenly on no man”* (I Timothy 5:22).

As the chosen witnesses of high heaven in a day of great wickedness, dense ignorance, and blasphemy, O may we be enabled to heed the Divine injunction: *“See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; For our God is a consuming fire”* (Hebrews 12: 25-29).