

ON MINISTRY IN THE WORD.

E. I have heard that you assert that "every brother is competent to teach in the assembly of the saints!"

W. If I did so, I should deny the Holy Ghost. No one is competent to do this who has not received gift from God for this very purpose.

E. Well, but you believe that every brother in the assembly of the saints has *a right* to speak if he is able?

W. Indeed I do not. I deny *the right* to any one save God the Holy Ghost; a man may in nature be very able to speak, and to speak *well*, but if he cannot "please his neighbour for good to edification," the Holy Ghost has not fitted him to speak; and he is dishonouring God his Father, grieving the Spirit, and undervaluing Christ's Church if he does speak, and is shewing, moreover, his own self-will.

E. Well, what is the peculiarity which you do hold?

W. You may think it peculiar to me, perhaps, to believe that as the Church belongs to Christ, He has—in order that its attention may not be wrongly directed,

and its time misspent in listening to that which is not profitable (pretty as it may be)—given gifts to it, by which alone it is to be edified and ruled.

E. No, I admit that, and only wish that there were a little more coveting of such gifts from God, and more caution to put a stop to the use of every other means, however accredited by human power or eloquence.

W. I hold also that the Holy Ghost gives gifts to whom He pleases, and also what gifts He pleases. And that the saints ought so to be united together as that the gift of one brother should never make the exercise of the real gift of another irregular, and that there should be an open door for the little as well as the great gifts.

E. That is a matter of course.

W. Not so; for neither in the Church of England nor in Dissent do I find 1 Cor. xiv. acted upon. Moreover, I assert that no gift from God has to wait for a sanction from the Church ere it is used. *If* it is of God, He will accredit it, and the saints recognise its value.

E. Do you admit "*a regular ministry*?"

W. If by a regular ministry you mean a *stated* ministry (that is, that in every assembly those who are gifted of God to speak to edification will be both limited in number and known to the rest), I do admit it; but if by a regular ministry you mean an *exclusive* ministry, I dissent. By an *exclusive* ministry I mean the recognising certain persons as so *exclusively* holding the place of teachers, as that the use of a real gift by any one else would be irregular. As for instance, in the Church of England and in most dissenting chapels, a sermon

would be felt to be *irregular* which had been made up by two or three persons really gifted by the Holy Ghost.

E. On what do you build this distinction?

W. From Acts xiii. 1, I see that at Antioch there were but five whom the Holy Ghost recognised as teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Doubtless, at all the meetings it was only these five, one or more of them, as it pleased the Holy Ghost, who were expected by the saints to speak. This was a *stated* ministry. But it was not an *exclusive* ministry; for when Judas and Silas came (xv. 32), they were pleased to take their places among the others, and then the recognised teachers were more numerous.

E. And what connection would this have with the giving out of a Psalm, &c. or with praying or reading a portion of Scripture?

W. These would fall like the rest entirely under the Holy Ghost's direction. Alas for the man whose self-will chose to give out a hymn, or to pray, or read a scripture, without the guidance of the Spirit! In doing these things in the assembly of the saints, he is professing to be moved and guided by the Holy Ghost; and to profess this where it is not true is very presumptuous. If the saints know what communion is, they will know how very difficult it is to lead the congregation in prayer and singing. Exhortation is comparatively easy, because the basis of it is fixed in the precepts of Scripture, though the just application of those precepts to the minds and circumstances of persons present always supposes a great power of the Spirit. To address God in

the name of the assembly, or to suggest to it a hymn as the vehicle for the expression of its real state to God, requires great discernment, or else a most immediate guidance from God.

E. But if there were five gifted persons present at a meeting, how could they, without pre-arrangement, avoid clashing in their ministration?

W. By waiting upon the Holy Ghost, each would get his own guidance whether to speak or to be silent, and how and what to speak. And if while one was speaking another had a matter given to him, the first would gladly sit down (1 Cor. xiv. 30).

By the habit of *pre-arrangement*, religious persons, at the freest meetings which they know, are now prevented one lesson of *dependence upon God*, and one opportunity of learning from Him, which those who act otherwise know to be very precious. By liberty of ministry, you will observe I do *not* mean that all the brethren present have liberty to speak; but that the Holy Ghost has liberty to use any gift Himself may have bestowed.

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