

PLAIN PAPERS ON THE LORD'S SECOND COMING

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

CHRISTENDOM

What varied thoughts and feelings are awakened in the soul by the very sound of the word "Christendom"! It is a terrible word. It brings before us, at once, that vast mass of baptized profession which calls itself the Church of God, but is not; which calls itself Christianity, but is not. Christendom is dark and a dreadful anomaly. It is neither one thing nor the other. It is not **"the Jew or the Gentile, or the Church of God."** It is a corrupt mysterious mixture, a spiritual malformation, the masterpiece of Satan, the corrupter of the truth of God, and the destroyer of the souls of men, a trap, a snare, a stumbling-block, the darkest moral blot in the universe of God. It is the corruption of the very best thing, and therefore the very worst of corruptions.

Christendom is that thing which Satan has made of professing Christianity. It is worse, by far, than Judaism; worse by far than all the darkest forms of paganism, because it has higher light and richer privileges, makes the very highest profession, and occupies the very loftiest platform. Finally, it is that awful apostasy for which is reserved the very heaviest judgments of God - the most bitter dregs in the cup of His righteous wrath.

True it is, blessed be God, there are a few names even in Christendom who, through grace, have not defiled their garments. There are some brilliant embers amid the smouldering ashes - precious stones amid the terrible debris. But as to the mass of Christian profession to which the term Christendom applies, nothing can be more appalling, whether we think of its present condition or its future destiny.

We doubt if Christians generally have anything like an adequate sense of the true character and inevitable doom of that which surrounds them. If they had it would solemnize their minds, and cause them to feel the urgent need of standing apart, in holy separation, from Christendom's ways, and distinct testimony against its spirit and principles. But let us turn again to our Lord's profound discourse on the mount of Olives, in which, as we have already observed, He deals with the subject of the Christian profession. This He does in three distinct parables, namely, the household servant; the ten virgins; and the talents. In each and all we have the two things noticed above, the genuine and the spurious; the true and the false; the bright and the dark; that which is of Christ, and that which is of Satan; that which belongs to Heaven, and that which emanates from hell.

We shall glance at the three parables which embody, in their brief compass, a vast mine of most solemn and practical instruction.

Turn to Matthew 24:45-47.

“Who, then, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.”

Here, then, we have at once the source and object of all ministry in the house of God.

- **“Whom his lord hath made ruler.”** This is the source.
- **“To give them meat in due season.”** This is the object.

These things are of the very highest possible moment, and they are worthy of the reader’s most profound thought. All ministry in the house of God, whether in Old or New Testament times, is of divine appointment. There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in appointing to the ministry. Neither is there such a thing as a self-constituted ministry. None but God can make or appoint a minister of any sort or description. Thus, in Old Testament times, the Lord appointed Aaron and his sons to the priesthood; and if a stranger presumed to meddle with the functions of the holy office, he was to be put to death.

Even the king himself dared not touch the priestly censer, for we are told of Uzziah, king of Judah, that, **“When he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men. And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary: for thou hast trespassed: neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God . . . And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death”** (II Chronicles 26).

Such was the solemn result - the awful consequence of man’s daring intrusion upon that which was wholly of divine appointment. Has this no voice for Christendom? Assuredly it has. It sounds a warning note in our ears. It tells the professing Church, in accents not to be mistaken, to beware of human intrusion upon a domain which belongs only to God.

“Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for [not by] men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins . . . And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called [not of men but] of God, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5).

Nor was this principle of divine appointment confined to the high and holy office of the tabernacle.

No man dare put his hand to the most insignificant part of that sacred structure unless by the Lord's direct authority.

“The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.”

Nor could Bezaleel choose his companions in labour, or appoint whom he would to the work, any more than he could choose or appoint himself. No; this, too, was divine. **“And I,”** says the Lord, **“Behold I have given with him Aholiab.”** Thus Aholiab, as well as Bezaleel, held his commission immediately from the Lord Himself, the only true source of all ministerial authority.

Nor was it otherwise in the case of the prophetic office and ministry.

God alone could make, and fit, and send a prophet. Alas! There were those of whom the Lord had to say, **“I have not sent them, yet they ran.”** They were unhallowed intruders upon the domain of prophecy, just as there were upon the office of the priesthood; but all such brought down upon themselves the judgment of God.

And, may we not ask, Is this great principle changed? Has ministry been shifted from its ancient base? Has the living stream been diverted from its divine source? Is it true that this more precious and glorious institution has been shorn of its lofty dignities? Can it be possible that, under the times of the New Testament, ministry has been cast down from its divine excellency? Has it become a mere human appointment? Can man appoint his fellow, or appoint himself to any one branch of ministry in the house of God?

What answer is to be returned to these questions? No doubtful one, thank God; but a distinct and emphatic No!

Ministry was, is, and ever shall be, divine; divine in its source; divine in its nature; divine in its every feature and principle.

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (I Corinthians 12:46).

“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased Him.”

“And God hath set some in the Church; first, apostles; secondarily prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (verses 18, 28).

“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 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; 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” (Ephesians 4:7-13).

Here lies the grand source of all ministry in the Church of God, from first to last - from the foundation laid in grace, to the topstone, in glory. It is divine and heavenly, not human or earthly. It is not of man or by man, but of Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, and in the power of the Holy Ghost (see Galatians 1).

There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as human authority in any one branch of ministry in the Church.

- If it be a question of gift, it is emphatically stated to be **“the gift of Christ.”**
- If it be a question of assigned position, we are, with equal clearness and emphasis, told that **“God hath set the members.”**
- If it be a question of local charge, whether elder or deacon, it was entirely of divine appointment, by apostolic hands or apostolic delegates.

All this is so clear, so distinct, so palpable, on the very surface of Scripture, that it is only necessary to say, **“How readest thou?”** And the more we penetrate beneath the surface - the more we are conducted by the Eternal Spirit into the profound and precious depths of inspiration - the more thoroughly convinced we shall be that ministry, in its every department and every branch, is divine in its source, nature, and principles. The truth of this shines out in full-orbed brightness, in the Epistles; but we have the germ of it in the words of our Lord in Matthew 25:45, **“Whom his lord hath made ruler over his household.”** The household belongs to the Lord, and He alone can appoint the servants, and this He does according to His own sovereign will.

Equally plain is the object of ministry, as stated in this parable, and elaborated in the Epistles.

- **“To give them meat in due season.”**
- **“For the edifying of the body of Christ”** - that the Church may receive edifying.

It is this that lies near the loving heart of Jesus. He would have His household perfected - His Church edified - His body nourished and cherished. For this end, He bestows gifts, and maintains them in the Church, and will maintain them until they shall be no longer needed.

But alas! there is a dark side of the picture. For this we must be prepared since we have the picture of Christendom before us. If there is a **“faithful, wise, and blessed servant,”** there is also **“an evil servant”** who **“says in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming.”** Mark this. It is in the heart of the wicked servant that the thought originates as to the delay of the coming.

And what is the result? **“He shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken.”**

How awfully this has been exemplified in the history of Christendom, we need not say. Instead of true ministry flowing from the risen and glorified Head in the heavens, and promoting the edification of the body, the blessing of souls, and the prosperity of the household, we have a false clerical authority, arbitrary rule, a lording it over God's heritage, a grasping after this world's wealth and power, fleshly ease, self-indulgence, and personal aggrandizement, priestly domination in its nameless and numberless forms and practical consequences.

The reader will do well to apply his heart to the understanding of these things.

He will need to seize, with clearness and power, the distinction between clericalism and ministry.

- the one is a thoroughly human assumption; the other, a purely divine institution.
- the former has its source in man's evil heart; the latter has its source in a risen and exalted Saviour, who, being raised from the dead, received gifts for men, and sheds them forth upon His Church, according to His own will.

That is a positive scourge and curse; this, a divine blessing to men. In fine, this in its root-principle flows from Heaven and leads back thither; that in its root-principle flows from hell and leads thither again.

All this is most solemn, and it should exert a mighty influence upon our souls. There is a day coming when the Lord Christ will deal, in summary justice, with that which man has dared to set up in His house. We speak not of individuals - though surely it is a most serious and terrible thing for anyone to put his hand unto, or have aught to do with, that on which such awful judgment is about to be executed - but we speak of a positive system - a great principle which runs, in a deep and dark current, through the length and breadth of the professing Church - we speak of clericalism and priestcraft, in all its forms and in all its ramifications.

Against this dreadful thing we solemnly warn our readers. No human language can possibly depict the evil of it, nor can human language adequately set forth the deep blessedness of all true ministry in the Church of God. The Lord Jesus not only bestows ministerial gifts, but, in His marvelous grace, He will abundantly reward the faithful and diligent exercise of those gifts. But as to that which man has set up, we read its destiny in those burning words, "**The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"

May the gracious Lord deliver His servants and His people from all participation in this great wickedness which is perpetrated in the very bosom of that which calls itself the Church of God. And, on the other hand, may He lead them to understand, to appreciate, and to exercise that true, that precious, that divine ministry which emanates from Himself, and is designed, in His infinite love, for the true blessing and growth of that Church which is so dear to His heart. We are in danger, very great danger, while seeking (as we most surely should) to keep clear of the evil of clericalism - of rushing into the opposite extreme of despising ministry.

This must be carefully guarded against.

We have ever to bear in mind that [properly] ministry in the Church is of God. Its source is divine. Its nature is heavenly and spiritual. Its object is the calling out, the building up of the Church of God. Our Lord Christ imparts the varied gifts, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He holds the great reservoir of spiritual gifts. He has never given it up, and He never will. Spite of all that Satan has wrought in the professing Church; spite of all the actings of **“that evil servant”**; spite of all man’s daring assumption of authority which in no wise belongs to him; spite of all these things, our risen and glorified Lord **“hath the seven stars.”** He possesses all ministerial gifts, power, and authority. It is He alone who can make any one a minister. Unless He impart a gift there can be no true ministry. There may be hollow assumption - guilty usurpation - empty affectation - worthless talking; but not one atom of true, loving, divine ministry can there be unless where our sovereign Lord is pleased to bestow the gift. And even where He does bestow the gift that gift must be **“stirred up,”** and diligently cultivated, else **“the profiting”** will not **“appear unto all.”** The gift must be exercised in the power of the Holy Ghost, else it will not promote the divinely appointed end.

But we are rather anticipating what is yet to come before us in the parable of the talents, so we shall close here by simply reminding the reader that the weighty subject on which we have been dwelling has direct reference to the coming of our Lord, inasmuch as all true ministry is carried on in view of that great and glorious event. And not only so, but the counterfeit, the corrupt, the evil thing will be judicially dealt with when the Lord Christ shall appear in His glory.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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