

"Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you (episcopous) *bishops* or *overseers*."—Acts xx. 17. "Here," says Dr. Campbell, "there can be no question that the same persons are denominated presbyters and bishops." Nor is this the only passage in which we find the terms convertible. In Titus i. 5. it is said, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* (Gr. presbuterous) in every city;" and then it follows in verse 7: "For a bishop (episcopos) must be blameless." In like manner, the Apostle Peter uses the terms while addressing the Christians of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, provinces full of Christian churches and pastors at the time. He exhorts all the *elders* of all these churches to exercise the office of a bishop, (Gr. episcopountes), rendered in our translation *taking the oversight*; so the elders were the bishops, or else they had no right to exercise themselves in the office. Again, in the Epistle to the Church of Philippi, Paul sends his salutation to the saints, "with the bishops and deacons." These could not be bishops in the prelatical sense; they could be none else than the elders of the church or congregation. Finally, the largest and most particular account given of the officers of the New Testament Church, is found in Eph. iv. 11:—"And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." On this Dr. Dwight remarks:—"Here we find at least four sorts of officers in the church, four classes of men who are empowered each to do something in the church which they only had a right to do. The office of *Apostles* is acknowledged on all hands long since to have terminated. Of *Prophets*, it is only necessary to observe, that their office must terminate, of course, when inspiration terminates. *Evangelists*, the third class here mentioned, are universally acknowledged to have been extraordinary officers, and to have ceased in a very early period of the church, unless the word be supposed to denote merely a minister without a care. There remains, then, only *Pastors* and *Teachers*. From the phraseology here used, it appears to me evident, that they were not two distinct orders of men, but one destined to feed and teach the church. The language is not as in the preceding clauses, '*some pastors and some teachers*,' but '*some pastors and teachers*,' that is, some who were both *pastors* and *teachers*. To teach the church is to feed it with the bread of life."

IV. Great use is made of the practice and testimony of the fathers in support of *Episcopacy*; but this is a broken reed to depend upon.

1. They awfully contradict each other. Irenæus testifies that Linus was made bishop of Rome by Paul and Peter, and after him Anacletus, and after him Clement. *Tertullian* testifies that Clement was the first bishop of Rome after Peter. *Eusebius* declares that Linus was the first bishop of Rome after the martyrdom of Paul and Peter. Again, that Peter was the first bishop of Antioch. Again, that Euodius was the first bishop of Antioch. *Jerome* declares that Peter sat at Rome twenty-five years, until the last year of Nero. Again, that Ignatius was the third bishop of Antioch after the Apostle Peter. *Dionysius*, bishop of Rome, asserts that Peter came to Rome in the beginning of Nero's reign, and sat there twenty-five years. Nero reigned but fourteen years; and, according to the united testimony of antiquity, put Peter to death. *Origen* says that he had read in the works of a martyr, that Ignatius was the second bishop of Antioch after Peter. *Epiphanius* declares that both Paul and Peter were bishops of Rome.

These instances prove that the fathers, however sincere, and however satisfactory their testimony concerning facts which passed under their own eyes, yet received traditional accounts loosely, and both believed and recorded much of what took place before their time, without truth or evidence.

2. The works of several of the fathers have been interpolated, corrupted, and partially lost. Concerning the epistles of Ignatius, which are peculiarly appealed to in this controversy, Mosheim observes, that he esteems "the authenticity of the Epistle to Polycarp to be extremely dubious;" and declares the question concerning all his epistles to labour under much obscurity, and to be embarrassed with many difficulties. Where there is so much uncertainty, a safe reliance cannot be placed for the decision of any point not otherwise supported.

3. Corruption and the love of power have thrown the church under an *Episcopal* form of government very early, and it has been the prevailing form since; but some of the most pious and best informed of the fathers freely acknowledge that it was not so in the beginning.

*Jerome*, the translator of the Latin Bible, a great and powerful writer of the fourth century, and who lived and died in Palestine, says, "that a *presbyter* is the same as a *bishop*; and that originally the churches were governed by the joint council of the presbyters." Again: "Let the bishops know that they are greater than presbyters, rather by custom than by the real appointment of the Lord." And again he says:—"Among the ancients, presbyters and bishops were the same."—*Dr. Dwight's Theo.*, vol. vi.