

CANADIAN PULPIT.

No. 72.

The Ministry Christ's Gift to the Church.

(Eph. iv. 7-16.)

Sermon preached at the opening of Algoma Presbytery at its meeting in Webbwood, March 10th, 1896, by the Moderator, Rev. J. C. Robertson, M.A., Gore Bay, and published by request of the Presbytery. To be read with Bible in "and for text and citations.

The Church is Christ's body, and all its true members are members of His mystical body. As all members of the body have not the same office but have their own separate functions to perform to the body, so the members of Christ have their different and separate parts to perform towards the growth and edification of the body of Christ.

This is the starting point in presenting the subject chosen for this occasion which is

THE MINISTRY—CHRIST'S GIFT TO THE CHURCH, as presented in the passage before us.

In no other passage of Scripture is given at one view so clearly and fully—the grant, institution, use, benefit and continuance of the ministry, as here. It is declared to be the gift of Christ; "And He gave etc." v. 11.

Here let me say, it is the great fundamental of all Church order, power and worship, as recognized by us, that the gift and grant of Christ is the origin of the ministry. If it had not been given of Christ, it had not been lawful for any of the sons of men to institute such an office or appoint such officers. Had any attempted so to do there would have been but nullity in what they did, as their attempt would have been expressly against the headship of Christ or His supreme authority over the Church.

And, seeing that it is Christ's sole prerogative to give a ministry to the Church, it was promised of old that He would do so:—as in Jer. iii. 15: "And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding," as well as signally foretold in the 68th Psalm. And as His doing of it is an act of His Mediatorial power, as it is declared in this place, and in Matt. xxviii. 18, so it is a fruit of His care, love and bounty. Eph. v. 25-27.

Hence it follows that not only officers in the Church, which are not of Christ's giving by institution, and officers, that are not of His gift and grant by provision and furnishment, have no place in His Church, but are set up in opposition to His authority, and in contempt of His care and bounty.

That Christ alone—the King and Head of the Church—can institute and furnish the ministry, abundantly appears from the eminency of the gift. This is declared in various particulars in our text; and these are such that neither the wisdom, skill nor power of any or all of the sons of men can have any share in whatsoever. This appears—

1. In the first place—from the grandeur of its introduction; the great and solemn preparation that was made for the giving out of this gift.

It was given by Christ when "He ascended up on high, and led captivity captive," v. 8—taken from Ps. lxxviii. 17, 18.

The glorious appearance of God in Mount Sinai in giving of the Law—His descending and ascending unto that purpose, is intended here, and the description is applied to Christ because all the glorious work of God in and towards the Church of old were either representatory, or gradually introductory of Christ and the Gospel. The glorious ascending of God from Mount Sinai after the giving of the Law was a representation of Him ascending "far above all heavens that He might fill all things." And as God then led captivity captive in the destruction of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who had long held His people in captivity and under cruel bondage; so dealt the Lord Christ now in the destruction and captivity of Satan and all his powers.—Col. ii. 15.

Next it is said "He gave gifts unto men." In the psalm it is said that "He received gifts for men." Some supposed a difficulty here, but the reading according to the record and the sense, plainly is that Christ received gifts as Mediator, that He might give them unto men. First of these gifts was the gift of the ministry, and along with this the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Now, to what end was this glorious theatre, as it were, prepared, and all this preparation made, all men and angels being called thereto.

It was to set out the greatness of the gift He would bestow, and the glory of the work which He would effect. This was to furnish the Church with ministers, and ministers with gifts for the discharge of their office and duty.

2. In the second place—its eminency appears from its original acquisition by Christ.

There was a power acquired by Christ for this great donation. This the Apostles declares in v. 9, "Now, that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first." Having mentioned in v. 8, the ascension of Christ as the immediate cause or fountain of the communication of this gift, in v. 9 he traces it to its first original. What the apostle would teach here is, that in the deep humiliation and death of Christ lay the foundation of His Mediatorial authority, whereof the ministry is an effect, Phil. ii. 9-10. And it was appointed by Him to be the ministry of that peace between God and man which was made therein and thereby, Eph. ii. 14, 16, 17. For when He had made this peace by the blood of the Cross, He preached it in the giving those gifts unto men for its solemn declaration, see 2 Cor. v. 18-21.

Wherefore, seeing the authority whence this gift proceeded was granted unto Christ upon His descending into the lower parts of the earth, and the design of the gift is to declare and preach the peace which He made between God and man by His atoning death, this gift also relates thereon to. The Gospel ministry has its roots in Calvary: it rests upon the blood of the everlasting covenant. Hereon depends the honor and excellency of the ministry, on account of which it is to be esteemed and valued,—its relation to the humiliation of Christ, and the authority bestowed on Him therefore.

3. Next in order, we notice, how eminent and signal the gift of the ministry in the immediate cause of its actual communication, so the qualification of the Lord Jesus for the bestowing of it, viz., His glorious ascension and exaltation.

By His death He acquired the right unto it; but His actual investiture with all glorious power was to precede the communication of it, vs. 8, 10.

He was first to ascend up on high, triumph over all His and our adversaries, put now under Him into absolute and eternal captivity, before He gave out this gift. Accordingly, He is said "to ascend far above all heavens," i.e., the visible heavens through which He passed on His way into the glorious presence of God, or unto the right hand of the Majesty on High.

It is also added why He was thus gloriously exalted, it was "that He might fill all things." This, not in the essence of His nature, but in the exercise of His power. He had laid the foundation of the Church on Himself—in His death and resurrection; but now the whole fabric is to be reared furnished and finished. This He ascended to accomplish, and did it principally in the grant of the ministry. This was the first exercise of that glorious power with which the Lord Jesus Christ was vested upon His exaltation, the first effect of His filling all things unto the glory of God the Father, and the Salvation of His elect. And these things are mentioned that in the contemplation of their greatness and order we may learn and know how excellent a gift is this donation of Christ—the Ministry.

Hence appears also, how contemptible a thing is the most pompous ministry in the world, which proceeds not from this original.

4. Again, the eminency of the gift of the ministry is manifest from the nature of the gift itself; for it consists in gifts.

The expression is "He gave gifts." There is an act of giving here expressed, and the thing given is "gifts." Wherefore the ministry is a gift of Christ not only because freely and bountifully given by Him to the Church; but also because spiritual gifts do essentially belong unto it,—are indeed its life, and inseparable from its being. A ministry without gifts is no ministry of Christ's giving, nor is it of any use in the Church, nor of any other effect but to deceive the souls of men. To set up such a ministry is both to despise Christ and utterly to frustrate the ends of the ministry, those for which Christ gave it, and which are here expressed. For

First—Ministerial gifts and graces are the great evidence that the Lord Jesus takes care of His Church, and provides for it as called into the order and to the duties of the Church. To set up a ministry which may be continued by outward forms and orders of men only, without any communication of gifts from Christ, is to despise His authority and call. Neither is it His mind that any Church should continue in order, any longer or otherwise than as He bestows these gifts for the ministry.

Second—These gifts are the only means and instruments whereby the work of the ministry can be performed, and the end of the ministry attained. The ends of the ministry here mentioned—called its work, are "the perfecting of the Saints," the edifying of the body of Christ until we come unto a perfect man." Hereof nothing at all can be done without these spiritual gifts; and therefore a ministry devoid of these is a mock ministry—and no ordinance of Christ.

5. Again, the eminency of this gift appears in the variety and diversity of the offices and officers which Christ gave in giving the Ministry, v. 11.

(Concluded next issue.)