

name did not confer any new function or honour on the pastor; but it was merely a short and convenient manner of addressing him, just as, for convenience, in Presbyterian churches we speak of the ministers and the elders, instead of the ruling-elder who teaches and the ruling-elders who do not teach. If it were permitted to refer to early uninspired church records we should find the pastor occasionally called the bishop to distinguish him from the other elders associated with him in government; and this too at a time when the term bishop retained its New Testament signification as equivalent to elder. This continued down to the middle of the second century, after which the pastor only, and he very generally, was called bishop. In the middle of the third century, we have the first instance of the pastor of a congregation having the oversight of sister or suburban congregations and their pastors. There is conclusive historical proof, which want of space prevents me from stating—but which is accessible to the English reader in Messrs Clark's admirable edition of the *Fathers*—That bishops down to the middle of the third century were congregational bishops, that is, bishops of single congregations, and hence that the presbyters or elders who were associated with them were the same as the ruling-elders who did not teach, and who are referred to in 1 Timothy v. 17. It is a great mistake to suppose that the magnifying of the distinction between ruling-elders who taught and those who did not, on the part of pastors who were ambitious and tyrannical, furnished the germ of prelacy which was developed into a great hierarchy. No amount of ambition could convert a congregational bishop into a diocesan, while the *constitution* of the Church remained unimpaired. The change by which a congregational bishop became a diocesan was a fundamental and *organic* change; so that Prelacy is in no sense a development of Presbytery. To maintain that, in view of the early history of the Church, the distinction between teaching elders and those who did not teach, and the government of both combined, did, and must, lead to ecclesiastical despotism, is not only to overlook the organic change referred to, but it is equivalent to saying that the only condition of civil or ecclesiastical liberty is pure democracy, of which there is no trace in the Word of God.

Practical reflections:—We cannot fail to notice the great importance attached to church government in the Word of God. Not to refer to the Old Testament, we find the Apostles spending much of their time in organizing churches. Paul not only laboured in this work himself, but he employed Timothy, Titus, and others as his assistants in it, leaving them frequently to complete the work which he had begun, or sending them to correct any irregularities which had occurred. Indeed, assisting Paul in church-organization seems to have been the specific work of these evangelists, who were subsequently called "apostolic men." Deacons were appointed at Jerusalem, and elders were ordained in every Gentile congregation; the Jewish congregations had them previously, so that Jewish elders held office without reappointment. All this organization was effected in an age of religious revival. Hence the Apostles were enabled to leave the church as complete in its *polity* as in its *doctrine*.

The duties of *elders*—using the term now to denote ruling-elders who did not teach—were very onerous and important. The *elders* were the great majority of spiritual office-bearers. All the duties of spiritual care and oversight devolving on the pastor, devolved equally on them, such as