

It is a remarkable fact, not easily reconciled with our present practice, that here is only one text in the whole New Testament, viz., 1 Tim. v. 17, which clearly recognizes, although in an *incidental* manner, the distinction between teaching and ruling elders. Can we believe that if such a wide distinction as at present exists between them among us, had been designed by the Head of the Church, we should have been left to learn its nature from one incidental allusion? If their duties are so very different, why is there no separate enumeration of their qualifications? What writer on Presbyterian government or Church Law would think of speaking of ministers and elders under one name, and of identifying their duties and their qualifications? This, however, is exactly what we find in the New Testament. The duties and qualifications of all elders are thrown indiscriminately into one catalogue. What writer on our ecclesiastical polity would dream of doing this?

All elders in the New Testament Church were by their office *teachers*. It is acknowledged by all whose opinions on this subject are entitled to any respect that elder and bishop are terms applied interchangeably in the New Testament to the same *grade* of ministers. With this fact in our mind, we turn to the Word of God to learn what were the duties and qualifications of this class of office-bearers, and we find Paul, writing for all ages, declaring that all bishops or elders, without exception, must be "apt to teach." (1 Tim., iii, 2.) And in his epistle to Titus, whom he had left in Crete to "ordain elders in every city," we find him giving great prominence to the teaching functions of the eldership. The man whom he will have admitted into that office, must be one "holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayer." (Tit., i, 9.) This is surely teaching! yet there is no hint that these words are applicable to only one class of elders. In controversy with opponents, Presbyterians are wont to point to the fact that Titus was instructed to ordain elders or bishops in every city as a convincing proof not only that diocesan episcopacy was then unknown, but also that it was the law of the early church that every congregation should be governed by a plurality of elders. In this they do well, but if when they find, as we have seen, the same duties and qualifications required of all these elders, they would argue that no very wide distinction of duties did obtain amongst them, they would do better. To us it appears very evident from the manner in which Paul treats of the eldership, that all its members were teachers *ex officio*, and that the impassable gulph which now separates "the elders who rule well" from those who labour in word and doctrine, had not then been discovered.

What has our modern elder to do with *teaching*? Truth compels us to answer,—Usually nothing more than any other member of the congregation. Sometimes they are teachers in the Sabbath School. A few of them catechise from house to house, and hold prayer-meetings in their allotted districts. Occasionally they may reprove an erring brother. The vast majority of them do not teach. And no work is expected at their hands for which it is necessary that they should be "apt to teach." It was not so in the early church. All elders were expected and ordained to do essentially the same work. They were appointed to teach and rule, and consequently they were required to have an aptitude for both parts of the work.

It was, however, deemed expedient that some who had gifts which fitted them peculiarly for public speaking should give themselves up chiefly to "labour in word and doctrine," but there is no reason to imagine that the rest ever abdicated their functions as *teachers*. They gave the precedence in teaching to those who were wont to "labour in word and doctrine," but doubtless they still continued to teach from house to house, and in public also, when occasion required, they gave evidence that they were "apt to teach," and "able both to exhort and convince the gainsayers."