

THE REVIEW AND HERALD. Vol. 57, No. 1.

"Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is Truth."

Battle Creek Mich. January 4. 1881.

James White Editor,

J. N. Andrews Associate Editor,

U. Smith Resident Editor.

ORGANIZATION AND DISCIPLINE.

The various forms of organization and church government existing in the several religious bodies of our time, is evidence that church organization and discipline are subjects upon which great and good men have differed. The testimony of the Bible, therefore, especially of the New Testament, must be allowed to decide then subjects of vast importance to the prosperity of the church. In no one chapter or book of the New Testament, has Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, or Jude, written out a complete system of Christian discipline, giving the positions and duties of the several officers of the church.

But that there should be order in the church of God is evident, not only from the declarations of the apostles, and the record of what they did, given in the Acts of the Apostles; but from the great facts relative to organization and order found in the Old Testament. The Jewish church was disciplined by a thorough system of organization. God is the same in all ages. The freedom of the gospel of the Son of God does not consist in laxity and confusion.

The epistles of Paul and of Peter distinctly speak of officers of the church, and of their duties. The Now Testament clearly defines the relation which Christ sustains to the ministry and to the church, and also the proper relation of the ministry to the church and to one another. But the system of Christian organization is not given as fully in the New Testament as the system of Jewish organization was given in the Old Testament. Having, however, the benefit of both the record of the system of the former and the declarations and acts of the first apostles of the letter, we have all that Infinite Wisdom saw necessary for the Christian church.

The relation which Christ sustains to the ministry and to the church, is stated in the following words of our Lord and of Paul: **"One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."** Matt. 23:8. "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ." 1 Cor. 11: 3. Christ is the great Shepherd of all, while his ministers are under-shepherds.

And Paul would impress the church, with her duty to the ministry in these words: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God." Heb. 13: 7. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account." Verse 17. And yet it was not the design of God that any system of organization should exist in the Christian church that would take the leadership from Christ.

Organization was designed to secure unity of action, and as a protection from imposture. **It was never intended as a scourge to compel obedience,** but, rather, for the protection of the people of God. Christ does not drive his people. He calls them. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Our living Head leads the way, and calls His people to follow.

Human creeds cannot produce unity. Church force cannot press the church into one body. Christ never designed that human minds should be molded for Heaven by the influence merely of other human minds. "The head of every man is Christ." His part is to lead, and to mold, and to stamp his own image upon the heirs of eternal glory. However important organization may be for the protection of the church, and to secure harmony of action, **it must not come in to take the disciple from the hands of the Master.**

All true ministers are Christ's ambassadors. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us ; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5: 20.

In their ministry they are to represent the doctrine of Christ, and the interests of his cause in this world. They surrender their own judgment and will to Him who has sent them. No man can be Christ's ambassador, until he has made a complete surrender of his right of private judgment to Christ. Neither can any man properly represent Christ who surrenders his judgment to his fellow-man.

But the subject must not be left here, with the truth partly expressed. The words of Christ and his apostles relative to unity and the ordained means to secure it, and proper discipline, must have a qualifying bearing upon the subject, lest unsanctified men, who do not submit their will and judgment either to Christ or to church authority, assume the gospel ministry, and divide and scatter the flock of God.

But here we wish it distinctly understood that officers were not ordained in the Christian church to order or to command the church, or to "lord it over God's heritage." In the case of difference of opinion that arose in some of the primitive churches relative to circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses, recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, the apostles and elders at Jerusalem acted as counselors in a manner to give room for the Holy Ghost to sit as Judge.

The report of that blessed meeting at Jerusalem to settle a festering difficulty, commences on this wise:

"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." And the brethren who were from among the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia, "rejoiced for the consolation." Differences settled in this way frequently seem more than settled, and generally remain settled; while those disposed of by the exercise of more church authority are seldom really settled at all.

Between the two extremes, of church force, and unsanctified independence, we find the grand secret of unity and efficiency in the ministry and in the church of God. Our attention is called to this in a most solemn appeal from the venerable Apostle Peter to the elders of his time: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you,

taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away, Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." I Pet. 5:1-5.

Those who drafted the form of organization adopted by S. D. Adventists labored to incorporate into it, as far as possible, the simplicity of expression and form found in the New Testament. The more of the spirit of the gospel manifested, and the more simple, the more efficient the system.

The General Conference takes the general supervision of the work in all its branches, including the State Conferences, The State Conference takes the supervision of all branches of the work in the State, including the churches in that State. And the church is a body of Christians associated together with the simple covenant to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

The officers of a local church are servants of that church, and not lords to rule over it with church force. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." Matt. 23:11. These officers should set examples of patience, watchfulness, prayer, kindness, and liberality, to the members of the church, and should manifest a good degree of that love to those they serve exhibited in the life and teachings of our Lord.

Our State Conference Committees should be men of God, with liberality and breadth of views and feelings that will lead them to have a fatherly care of all branches of the work in the Conference. It is their duty to counsel together in the fear and love of God, and regard themselves as a board of counselors to all the ministers and churches under their supervision, and not a board of directors. Our great leader and director is Christ.

The labors and duties of the General Conference Committee are still more extensive and important than those of the State Conference Committee. They should be men of experience, of breadth of views, and divested of sectional feelings, whose minds and hearts of love can take the best good of the cause in all its branches, and in all parts of the field- They should be regarded as a board of fathers to the cause in the highest sense.

In the fulfillment of the duties of their office, in taking the general supervision of the entire work, their strength is in so counseling with their brethren in the spirit of tenderness and love as to bind the hearts, of all the laborers to their hearts, and give room for the voice of the Holy Ghost. As was manifested in the days of the apostles. They should ever bear in mind that the head of every man is Christ.

They may counsel with the State Conference Committees in reference to ministers laboring here or there, but should never direct. "The head of every man [every minister], is Christ." **The minister who throws himself on any Conference Committee for direction, takes himself out of the hands of Christ.**

And that Committee that takes into its own hands the work of directing the ambassadors for Christ, takes a fearful responsibility: "One is your Master [Leader], even Christ, and all ye are brethren." Matt. 23:8. May God preserve to us our organization and form of church discipline **in its original simplicity and efficiency.**

J. W.

James White

Harvestime Books Resource Library
<http://www.remnant-prophecy.com>
<http://www.Harvestimebooks.com>
<http://www.bible-sabbath.com>