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WOMEN AND THE DEACON'S OFFICE.

It is generally known that one of our congregations having recently elected a female member to the office of deacon, "the question of the right of women to ordination to the office of deacon" came up before Presbytery, and was by Presbytery referred to Synod. The Synod answered the question by adopting the following item in the report of the Committee on Discipline: "That such ordination is, in our judgment, in harmony with the New Testament, and with the Constitution of the Apostolic Church." As some of the brethren, however, dissented from this decision, it was referred to a small committee to draw up a statement of the grounds on which Synod arrived at the conclusion indicated above.

And here we regard it of special importance, to keep steadily in view what the question really is, so as to allow no extraneous matter to be imported into its consideration. The question is not, May a woman preach and otherwise undertake the work of the Gospel Ministry? Or, may she be invested with the office of Ruling Elder, and sit in church courts? These are questions which we are persuaded our Synod would have answered in the negative, even more harmoniously than it answered the other in the affirmative. One point only, however, is now before us—the right of women, duly elected and qualified, to ordination to the office of deacon—and we object to burden the argument with any more general issues. The other questions referred to are never likely to come up for consideration in our church, and if they should, it will be time enough to consider them when they do actually arise.

Now there are two lines of argument on which we may proceed in considering this question, namely, the scriptural and the historical.

Confining ourselves, for the present, to the former, let us inquire Does the New Testament sanction the practice of women holding the office of deacon, and is it, as far as we know, consistent with the constitution and practice of the Apostolic Church? We are all agreed that for the institutions of God in His Church, we must first of all go to His own word, and that whatever may be set up or practiced in the name of religion, if not found there, can have no binding force or obligation on the conscience. True, the historical argument as to the institutions of the New Testament church is both valuable and important, but it is chiefly corroborative; whereas, "To the law and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Now in appealing to this "sure word of prophecy," on the subject before us, it will help us if we keep steadily in view the following points:

1. That the institutions and provisions of the Apostolic Church *were not all formally introduced at once, but from time to time, as they were found necessary to the comfort and edification of her members.*

Of course in the commission given to the apostles, and in the gifts of the spirit they enjoyed, all was provided for, but only to be brought into operation as the times required. Of this many examples might be given. Thus in preaching the gospel, according to their commission, to the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews, in organizing congregations and placing over them pastors and elders, in appointing deacons to attend to the outward business of the house of God, in giving a deliverance that freed Christians from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and in other respects, the apostles seemed to have followed the guidance of Providence as well as of the Spirit, in giving to the church a full organization. And indeed it had been so in setting up the institutions of the Old Testament, many of its laws and provisions having been introduced gradually, as necessity for them arose. For example the synagogue and its worship are thought to have originated in some condition of the country, in which it was difficult, if not impossible, to wait on the temple service, and yet it was sanctioned by priests, prophets and by our Lord Himself. And what is more remarkable, the Christian church, in her government and worship, is modeled rather after the synagogue than after the temple, the sacerdotal and hierarchical having no place in her. Indeed, so fully was the order of the synagogue transferred to the Christian church, that James calls a regular church assembly a synagogue, (Jam. 2. 2 Greek), and blames the officers for their partiality in assigning better seats to the rich than to the poor. The synagogue had a council of elders, "rulers of the synagogue," with a president (archisynagogos), having the power of discipline, even to excommunication. According to Vitranga, the president was also called legate or angel of the synagogue, because in offering prayer, he was a messenger sent to intercede for the whole assembly, which casts light on the meaning of the expression "the angels

of the churches," and perhaps on that difficult passage 1 Cor. 11: 10. In the synagogue also was the *Chazzan*, in Greek *hyperetes* (Luke 4; 20), church officer or beadle, who besides other duties, had the carrying the roll, containing the scriptures to be read, and placing it on the desk, and afterwards returning it to its place at the close of the service. Besides the synagogue had deacons, who had charge of the property, opened the doors and conducted strangers to seats, and attended generally to the comfort of the assembly as well as being almoners and managers of the funds. And as the sexes sat apart, separated by a partition of some height, female officers were required for one side of the house, to attend to the comfort of the worshippers, and preserve order. And it is to the strict order, thus to be maintained in Christian assemblies, that Paul is supposed by some to refer when he commands, "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak," in the sense of to converse or talk, by asking questions or explanations. Nor is the supposition by some of our best writers at all unreasonable that even before the choice of the seven (Acts vi.) one side of the great multitude of believers then in Jerusalem, (the Hebrews) had, after the example of the synagogue, parties already acting as deacons in taking care of their poor, whilst the Hellenists, being comparative strangers, had none, and therefore their poor were neglected. And favoring this idea is the fact that all the seven chosen had Hellenistic names, and all, therefore, seem to have been taken from the party that had complained, and thus putting them on equal footing with the Hebrews, perfect harmony was restored. The church as yet, however, was in a very inchoate state, and we cannot, at that early period, expect to find about her institutions all the completeness afterward attained. Certain it is, however, that the deacon's office came ultimately to be recognized as a divine and permanent institution in all the churches, and, therefore, Paul addresses the church at Philippi, as consisting of saints, bishops and deacons.

2. That the offices in the New Testament Church are indicated both by official names given to office-bearers, and also by terms descriptive of their work.

It is well known that many words in the New Testament have come to be used in at two-fold sense and meaning, the ordinary and appropriated. Such words as angel, devil, elder, overseer, pastor, deacon, and even church and synagogue, had originally a primary or ordinary meaning and use, in which we seldom now employ them. Thus instead of using the term angel for messenger, and devils for false accusers, in an appropriated use we employ these words to designate certain classes of spiritual beings. In like manner the terms overseer or bishop, elder, pastor and deacon are now mostly used as official names for office-bearers in the church, and in which sense, primary or appropriated, any one of these terms is employed in the original of the New Testament, can only be determined by a careful study of the

context. In its primary and ordinary signification the term rendered deacon simply means one who renders a service to another, and both it and the verb from it are often used in this sense, and are even employed to designate the obedience rendered by Christ. But in time it has come to be chiefly used as a designation of a church officer, and though as a substantive it is not used of the seven (Acts vi.), yet as a verb it is employed to express the nature of their work, "to serve tables" (*diakonein trapezais*). Now in many of the congregations organized by the apostles we have no account of the appointment of pastors, elders or deacons *at the time*, and yet afterwards by some reference to them in the epistles, either by their name or their work, we learn that they were there. And thus we think it a safe rule, that from the name we may infer the work, and from the work we may infer the office. Thus, for example, we may have no express mention by name of pastor or elder, yet if we find such words of exhortation addressed to any church as, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves," or, "for they watch for your souls," we know that these office bearers were there. Thus in one passage (Rom. 12: 6-8) the several office bearers in the church are wholly designated by their work. "Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy . . . ministry . . . teaching . . . exhortation . . . rule"—all official gifts indicated by the work proper to each. Among these "ministry," (*diakonia*) the deacons work, is in its operation doubly described as "giving with liberality," and "shewing merey with cheerfulness." Therefore when we have either the term deacon, *in connection with the church and her work*, or when *the work proper to the deacon's office* is clearly referred to, it is reasonably certain that a church officer is intended.

3. That how far any ordinance or institution is to be enjoyed or exercised by members of the church *can only be learned by subsequent facts, not from the account of its first institution.*

The church of the New Testament is a corporate institution, and all her members have all corporate rights and privileges, *unless when specially excepted.* How far, however, the enjoyment of such rights and privileges is limited or otherwise by such exceptions, can seldom be learned by anything said of the ordinance at its first institution but is to be gathered from subsequent facts. For example, were women to be admissible to the ordinance of baptism? Many things at first sight would suggest a negative answer. Women were not circumcised, and as baptism, as the *initiatory* ordinance, was now to take the place of circumcision, it might be argued that neither should women be baptized. And moreover at the full institution of Christian baptism, at our Lord's ascension, it is said "*He that believeth and is baptized,*" apparently leaving out women altogether. And for more than twenty years afterwards not one female is reported as admitted to the church by baptism. We have to wait those twenty years for one case

—the solitary case in the New Testament, the baptism of Lydia—and but for that one case it might be argued, with some shew of reason, that women were not to be admitted to this ordinance. And the same might be said of the right of women to partake of the Lord's Supper. There is not one concrete example of a woman communicating at the Lord's table recorded in the New Testament. And did not Paul, in his directions how to prepare for this ordinance, say, "But let a *man* examine himself," apparently leaving out all the female members. But we rightly *infer* that it is the privilege of women to come to the Lord's table because of the primitive company it is said "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, *with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren,*" and because of this company it is said *without any exception* "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking bread, and in prayers." Thus we gather that "*he*" in the institution of baptism, and "*a man*" in Paul's directions about the supper, are used in a generic sense for all of a class, and that "in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female."

Now let us see how these general principles will apply to the matter before us. Well, the first shews that the fact that the first seven deacons were all males does not necessarily exclude females from that office, inasmuch as the institutions of the New Testament were, to some extent, adapted to circumstances as they arose. The second shews that if we find both the name and the work and the qualifications proper to the deacon's office predicated of women, and *that clearly in church relation*, they must be admissible to that office. The third shews that the privilege of holding and exercising the deacon's office not being, in the case of women, *one of the things exc'p'd*, their right thereto is as plain, and even plainer, than to many other things which we freely accord them. These points then will, we think, apply in considering certain passages, in which we have the name, work and qualifications of the deacon, all predicated of women.

The first of these we notice is the well known passage, Rom. 16: 1-3, in which we have Phoebe, a member of the church at Cenchrea, preparing to visit Rome, and duly certified of her church standing by Paul, who was in Cenchrea or Corinth at the time. Now the apostle calls her "a deacon of the church at Cenchrea"—not deaconess, as in the margin of the R. V. and as used by some writers, for the word in Greek, being of the common gender, has no termination to distinguish sex. It is exactly equivalent to the English word servant, which without any change of form we apply to male and female. Now we hold that the word deacon is here used of Phœbe, not in its primary or ordinary sense, but in its appropriated sense of a church officer, *because it is spoken of her in church relation*. Had it been "a servant of God," or a "servant of the Lord," it would have proved nothing as to her holding office, because these expressions are applicable

to all who are of the household of faith. But we are not aware that "servant of the church," or any similar expression, is ever used of persons except in official positions. For example, we have, "elders in every church," "Now there were in the church at Antioch certain prophets and teachers," "the messengers of the churches," "the angels of the churches," and "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets," etc., and in every case official relation is meant. A parallel expression about an Old Testament leader will illustrate our meaning. "And Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant," evidently referring to his official position in Israel. But, as Paul assures Timothy, "the house of God is the church of the living God," and for Phœbe to be a servant in and to that house as much implies official relation as do the words quoted of Moses. Moreover that the apostle here speaks of Phœbe in an official sense is farther confirmed by the term which he employs to express what she had done for himself and others, "For she hath been a *succourer* of many, and of myself also." The word here rendered "succourer" (*prostatis*) signifies one standing before another in office, rank or service, and in the masculine is used for a Roman prefect, a magistrate, protector or patron, often corresponding to our terms president, moderator, chairman, overseer, or any one that is before or over others in any work to be performed. Now in either gender the word must retain something of this meaning, as it is formed from a verb (*prōhistēmi*) signifying to stand over or before in some recognized relation. Its force can be seen in the fact that it is twice used by Paul in describing the qualifications of a bishop (1 Tim. 3 : 3-6), as "one that *ruleth* well his own house, having his children in subjection, with all gravity," as every father and head of a family should. Having this shade of meaning, as applied to Phœbe it would exactly express what she had done for Paul and others, if aiding them officially as a deacon of the church, and strongly supports the conclusion that she is here spoken of, not as a private member merely, but as a recognized office bearer.

But sister Phœbe, as it appears, had a "business" to transact at Rome, and it is wonderfully foreign to the whole spirit of the passage to suppose that that business was private. She was deacon in a small congregation in Cenchrea, the Eastern or Asiatic port of Corinth on the isthmus. The members of the church in Cenchrea were probably of the humbler classes, mostly seafaring men, sailors and fishermen. Now we know that the churches at that time were wont to depute parties to travel with Paul, Titus and others, to raise funds for the relief of the needy, and those were called "messengers of the churches," as chosen and sent forth for that purpose (see 2 Cor. 8 : 16-24, and 9 : 3-5). In commending Phœbe to the Romans as a deacon in a sister church, Paul not only officially certifies her standing, and that she was worthy of their full confidence, but asks for her assistance and help from the wealthy and liberal members of the church in the great

metropolis. She was thus engaged in what, we have reason to believe, was quite customary at the time in many churches, and which is by no means uncommon in the present day. And thus not only in official designation but also in active work, Phœbe is here recognized as a church officer. And it is worthy of remark that almost all expositors, ancient and modern, with hardly an exception, are of the opinion that this passage implies that the sister here certified was in some position in the church, other than that of mere private membership.

But again we have in another passage the *qualifications* required in female deacons. In writing to Timothy how he "ought to behave himself in the house of God," Paul first instructs him as to how a bishop should be qualified, and then, in five particulars, the necessary qualifications which deacons should possess (1 Tim. 3: 1-10), and then, v. 11, adds as in the A. V.: "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." This would at first sight appear as an additional qualification which deacons should possess, but though usually so interpreted, there are no grounds for understanding the passage in that sense; first, because the character of a man's wife is never given as a qualification for his holding office in the New Testament church. If it had been so it would be of special importance in the case of a bishop, and yet in his case nothing of the kind is ever hinted. Then, secondly, there is no word for "*their*" in the original text, that would indicate any relation of the females referred to as the wives of deacons. The expression is, not "their wives," but simply "women" (*gunaikas*) which is the primary meaning of the word, and so translated in the R. V. And, thirdly, the grammatical construction of the whole passage in the original text forbids the idea of private relation betwixt the women mentioned and the deacons. Two connecting links hold grammatically together the whole passage about bishops, deacons, and women. The first of these is *dei'inai*, with an accusative case intervening, signifying what it is necessary the intervening accusative "must be." Though this connecting expression (*dei'inai*) is only found in the second verse, it is understood in the eighth and eleventh verses, and is accordingly supplied in italics by our translators. Thus connected the passage states, first, what it is necessary the bishop to be, then what it is necessary deacons to be, and then what it is necessary "women" to be, by way of qualifications. But if by "women" here are only meant private members of the church, why exclude male members, and why introduce only women in company with bishops and deacons, as requiring high qualifications. Then there is also another connecting word *hosautos*, translated "likewise" in verse eight, and "even so" in verse eleven, and by the revisers, "in like manner," which is used to connect things in some respects similar, or of a similar class, which class in the passage must be that of office bearers. As Alford remarks, *gunaikas* here, marked off by *hosautos*, must be an ecclesiastical class, and can hardly be other than

deaconesses, *ministrae*, as Pliny calls them in his letter to Trajan, such as "Phœbe was at Cenchrea." One of our most reliable expositors takes the same view. "Their wives,' rather *women*, i. e., deaconesses, for there is no reason that special rules should be laid down as to the wives of deacons, and not also as the wives of bishops. Moreover, if wives of deacons are meant, there seems to be no reason for the omission of 'their.' Also *hosautos*, 'even so,' 'likewise,' or 'in like manner,' denotes a transition to another class of persons. Also the omission of *domestic* duties in their case, though specified in the case of the man, verse 12, shews that they were not spoken of in their private capacity as wives. There were doubtless deaconesses at Ephesus, where Timothy was now laboring, as well as at Cenchrea, and yet no mention is made of them in this epistle if not here; whereas if they be meant here, Chap. III. embraces in due proportion all the offices of the New Testament church" (Crit. Com.) Two things in the passage further confirm this view. First, the manner in which women are here brought in by the apostle when giving instructions how deacons should be qualified. In verses 8-10, he describes what the deacon must be, then verse 11, what women must be, and then verse 12 goes back to the deacons, thus shewing by placing women in the very centre of what he had to say about deacons' qualifications, that they belonged to that class. Then again, not only must these women have certain qualifications, but the four mentioned are exactly the same as those required in men. By comparing the two lists we find that in the first qualification it is the very same adjective in different genders, that is employed, and in the other three words precisely of the same import. If then these women were not of the number of deacons at Ephesus when Paul wrote, the passage is not only obscure but misleading.

In several other passages of more general import, as in Paul's salutations to prominent women in different churches, who had been his helpers, and who are said to have "laboured," and to have "laboured much in the Lord," there may be reference to the same feature of the apostolic church. Some also understand the instructions given to Timothy, (1 Tim. 5 : 9), about widows being "taken into the number," or enrolled, as having similar reference to an order of female deacons; and Mosheim goes so far as to maintain that the widows (Acts vi. 1) were not themselves recipients of church help, but deaconesses, and that the ground of their complaint was that the funds placed at their disposal were not equal to those entrusted to the Hebrew deaconesses. We do not, however, think that the enrolled widows were anything by way of office, but simply recipients of church aid, as Timothy is directed, "If any man or women that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged, that it may relieve them that are widows indeed, (1 Tim. 5 : 6.)

As, however, we firmly believe that the passages we have considered fully bear out the conclusion that in the apostolic church women took their place with men in holding and exercising the deacon's office, it follows that we have full warrant to admit them to the same position still, and set them apart by ordination to the performance of its duties. And here we must say that to us the strangest feature in this whole matter is the difficulty which some brethren feel about *ordaining* women to this office, even when duly elected and found qualified. One brother, after owning the peculiar fitness of women for the performance of the duties of the deacons office, writes, "One difficulty is to find a warrant for her ordination to regular office work." Another thinks that a woman could just be as useful without ordination, and that it is therefore unnecessary to raise the question at all. Another thinks that her right to ordination cannot be proved because we have no example of a woman being inducted into office, by being anointed with oil, or by the laying of hands on her head; and so others in a similar strain. Now the obscurity seems to arise from imperfect views of the nature of ordination and its relation to holding office in the church. There are no less than eleven words in the Greek text of the New Testament, which our translators have rendered by the word "ordain." Six of these are used of persons being put into a position, such as office, of some kind. The first, only applied to Christ, and signifying to "mark off, separate or set apart," is twice used, Acts 10: 42 and 17: 31. The second, signifying "to make," and the third "to place," and the fourth "to become," are the words used for setting apart the apostles, Mark 3; 14, John 15: 16, Acts 1: 22, and 1 Tim. 2: 7. The fifth "to place in position" is used of priests Heb. 5: 1 and 8: 3, and of elders Tit. 1: 5. The sixth "to elect by raising the hand" is used of elders, Acts 14: 23. Now it is a remarkable fact that not in one of these words is what we call ordination by laying on of hands clearly expressed, while the last of the six makes election, by shew of hands, to be what appoints to, or puts the elder into office. And in fact, "the making or putting into place and position" in church office of any man or woman, must depend upon their being duly elected, proved and found qualified. Without these no presbytery would ordain to any office. In fact it is not *the man* we ordain, but the *pastor elect*, the *elder elect*, or the *deacon elect*, so that we literally "lay hands suddenly on no man." Following these, according to our Book of Discipline (p. 107), "Ordination and installation are authoritative acts, done in the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church." But these acts are simply to seal and testify, in a public, authoritative manner, what went before, and it is just as when a person has been elected or appointed to some office in the state, but before entering upon its duties, takes an oath of office. It is not the taking of the oath that makes him an officer of the government, but his election or appointment, the oath being merely a formal pledge of

fidelity. Now that a deacon elect is to be formally set apart and officially declared to be an office bearer in the church, by such an act of ordination as we perform, we are all agreed, but the *diakonos* is of no gender, and as we think we have made it clear, that a woman may be a *diakonos*, when duly elected and found qualified, the right of ordination is hers, as much as that of one of the other sex, who may have been elected at the same time. It is a simple syllogism. To a deacon elect, duly qualified and approved, belongs the right of ordination. But a woman may be a deacon elect, qualified and approved. Therefore to a woman, duly elected to the deacon's office and found qualified belongs the right of ordination. The principle is plain. To a woman belong all corporate rights in the church, *unless especially excepted*, as is the case as regards the ministry and the eldership, while it cannot be shewn that the deaconship is excepted, but the contrary is established. In fact her rights here are fuller and plainer than her rights to the Lord's table.

Nor is there any question as to the many and great advantages that would accrue to the church from having a few able and devoted women in every congregation in the deacons office. While we think so, however, we have no sympathy with a great deal spoken and written at present about restoring the old order of deaconesses, and getting our women organized into sisterhoods, and assigning them work apart from other members of the church. A great deal of such talk comes, not from just scriptural views of women's place and work in the church, but from the corruptions, that soon prevailed both in the East and West in relation to all ecclesiastical matters and institutions, by which, as has been well remarked "The convent swallowed up scriptural organizations of women, as the monastery absorbed the scriptural presbyters." In the days of Timothy active female deacons would be an arm of strength to the church. As has been said by a judicious writer, "From the seclusion in which oriental women were kept, and the improbability that there could be anything like free intercourse with them on the part of the apostles and first preachers of Christianity, the desirableness and necessity of having women specially devoted to the work of visiting and instructing them is apparent. Considering also the elastic nature of the constitution of the apostolic church it may readily be believed that, as in the case of deacons, the instant such a need was felt, steps would be taken to supply it. By such an arrangement the gospel could be introduced into many families, where otherwise it could hardly have found admission, and analogous causes may have led to the employment of women, as the instrumentality best adapted to many other forms of Christian work. And nothing is more certain historically than that at the close of the apostolic age women in office, and usually styled deaconesses, were to be found in all the churches." It might be added that the numerous and fierce persecutions to which the churches were subjected during

this period, "the spoiling of their goods," fines, imprisonment, violence and tortures in many forms, by which they were daily tried, would furnish much work for such consecrated women, and they could have access often to those who were "sick and in prison," such as no male office bearer in the church could possibly have. Whilst, however, thankful that our lines have fallen to us in more pleasant places and times, still there are many things which women in office could accomplish which men have neither the taste, talent, tact, nor time to attempt. In acquiring, holding and improving church property, providing and dispensing funds for current expenses, so that ordinances may be steadily enjoyed, and in many other respects, our deacons render very valuable services, which we have no desire to under value or belittle. But in the privacy of family life there are often sad scenes of suffering, hidden misery, wretchedness and want, into which even pastor or elder cannot penetrate, and which would be freely opened to the sympathetic, spiritual woman. Even when not acting officially, the presence of such a woman for a short time has been felt to be as an angel visit, how much more would our noble, Christian woman prove, when quickened by the felt obligation of being consecrated to God and his work. And now that female physicians, female teachers, etc., are felt to be in some measure required by the exigencies of society, there are many ways in which ladies, representing the claims of religion, might have doors of usefulness opened before them. If in each of our congregations we had even a small number of such women in office, they could organize the female element for practical purposes, more effectually than has ever been the case in the past. In local visiting, Sabbath school work, raising funds for the poor and for missions, the promotion of systematic beneficence, the cause of temperance, and Sabbath observance, they could do a work for the church, which our deacons never now attempt. In view of the manifold capabilities and opportunities for work such women would possess, we very fully sympathized with the words uttered in Synod by the late Moderator, "We are getting rid of the prejudice against the equality of men and women, and should be glad that the church has got so far forward in this great truth that God intends to use both men and women in advancing his cause."

We may add in conclusion that almost all the churches of the Reformation are moving more or less in this matter, and it is becoming one of the questions of the day. In many churches in the continent of Europe, and in the established church of England, a very marked interest in it has of late been awakened. In the report of the proceedings in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in its meeting of May last, a resolution was passed that deaconesses henceforth be ordained, not by presbyteries, but by Kirk sessions. The great Presbyterian Council, that lately met in London, also grappled with this question, and the paper on the subject by Professor Charteris

of Edinburgh, (in substance in the *Presbyterian Review* of last April), and the discussion that followed, shewed what an interest it has excited throughout the churches. And it is but meet that our church should lead the way in this matter. We accord to our female members their corporate right more fully than any church of the Reformation, and by following up what has, at our late meeting of Synod, been so auspiciously begun, we may still farther draw out into active operation the mighty moral force, lodged in our devoted, Christian women, and thus accomplish a work for which posterity will bless us.

Committee of Synod.

HOW TO GAIN HONOR.

BY THE REV. J. C. M FEETERS, PARNASSUS, PA.

“For them that honor me I will honor.” 1 Samuel 2: 30.

How positive these words ! There is no doubt here ; nor the shadow of doubt ; nor an uncertain syllable out of which to form a shadow. The clear truth shines out like the sun on a June morning. Give God honor, and he will give you honor.

The human heart craves honor. Human nature shuns abasement ; longs for promotion ; is not satisfied with a low position ; looks with longing eyes out among the stars, and wishes to be as bright as they, and as high, and as glorious. A state of humility is not man’s natural condition. He was created upright, with his face to radiate the light of the sky, and his thoughts to reach around the great creation, and his ambition to make way for him into the fuller glories of God.

But man fell by sinning against God ; he lost his honorable position by disobeying God ; and now humility is a necessity ; it is the first part of the journey up the hill from which he has descended. This humility consists in confessing sin, submitting to God’s will, cheerfully taking the lowliest position God assigns, and there rendering all the service possible, and with a glad heart. This humility is on the road to honor. Sinful man is low down at the beginning ; he does not know it ; yet he is there all the same. He is down low enough to be loathed by holiness ; to be condemned by justice ; to be wept over by mercy ; to be pitied by infinite love ; down low enough to find delight in disgrace, to drink in sin with greediness, to despise the law of God, to attempt to live without God and against him. That is almost as low as the devil. And it is just there the sinful man finds himself when he comes to his right mind. There is a peculiar frenzy, a sort of hallucination which seizes the human mind, and breeds proud thoughts, and gives birth to the opinion that we are high up at the start ; and vain man imagines that he is walking among the clouds of honor, when he is among the clouds of the smoky pit. He disdains to start in the low steps of humility ; that seems like going backward. He cannot