

I. THE DUTIES OF THE OFFICE OF ELDER

The title of an office is often taken from some characteristic duty belonging to it. Thus the title President is taken from the act of presiding; Secretary from the act of writing; Auditor (*hearer*) from the act of hearing financial reports. In such cases, the information derived from the title is generally meager. In some instances, however, offices newly created adopt the titles of previously existing offices which are similar to them; and in such instances the titles carry with them all of their previous significance, except so far as this is modified by the nature of the new office. Thus the term President, which first meant one who presides over an assembly and enforces order in its proceedings, when transferred to the chief officer of a college, and to the chief magistrate of the United States, carried with it the chief part of its previously acquired meaning. Now, it so happens that all the titles by which the Elder of a church is known were adopted from previously existing offices, and brought with them into their new application much of their former significance. That significance will enable us, therefore, to obtain a general idea of the duties of the office, and to better appreciate the more specific statements of the Apostles which will afterwards be considered.

ELDER - The title *Elder*, which is most frequently used by the Apostles, and which is still the most popular of these titles, obtained an official signification among the Jews long before its adoption into the Christian Church. Originally it designated the older men, or heads of families in Israel, who exercised a patriarchal government over their posterity: See [Ex. iv: 29; xix: 7](#). In the days of Christ it had become the title of the rulers of the Jewish synagogues, and of one of the classes composing the Sanhedrim. Reliable information in reference to the functions of the office among the Jews is quite meager; but it is sufficient to justify the assertion that those who enjoyed the title exercised authority in some capacity. When it was adopted, therefore, into the Christian Church, it brought with it at least this general idea, that those to whom it was applied were rulers in the church. The exact nature and limits of their authority it could not of course designate.

OVERSEER - The term *episcopos* brought with it a more clearly defined significance, and furnishes more definite information in reference to the duties of the office. Among the Athenians it was the title of "magistrates sent out to tributary cities, to organize and govern them." (See Robinson's N. T. Lexicon, and references there given.) Among the Jews it had very much that variety of application which the term overseer now has in English. It is used in the Septuagint for the officers appointed by Josiah to oversee the workmen engaged in repairing the temple, [2 Ch. xxxiv: 12, 17](#); for the overseers of workmen employed in rebuilding Jerusalem after the captivity; [Ne. xi: 5, 14](#); for the overseers of the Levites on duty in Jerusalem; [Ne. xi: 22](#); for the overseers of the singers in the temple worship; [Ne. xii: 42](#); and for subordinate civil rulers; Jos. Ant. 10. 4. 2. In all these instances it designates persons who have oversight of the persons for the purpose of directing their labors and securing a faithful performance of the tasks assigned them.

Such a word when applied to a class of officers in the Christian Church, necessarily carried with it the significance already attached to it. It indicated, both to Jew and Greek, that the persons so styled were appointed to superintend the affairs of the church, to direct the activities of the members, to see that everything was done that should be done, and that it was done by the right person, at the right time, and in the right way. Anything less than this would be insufficient to justify the title *overseer* as it was currently employed in that age. The details of the process by which all this was accomplished will appear as we advance.

SHEPHERD - The title Shepherd is still more significant than either of the other two. The Jewish shepherd was at once the ruler, the guide, the protector, and the companion of his flock. Often, like the shepherds to whom the angel announced the glad tidings of great joy, he slept upon the ground beside his sheep at night. Sometimes, when prowling wolves came near to rend and scatter the flock, his courage was put to the test: ([Jno. x: 12](#)); and even the lion and the bear in early ages rose up against the brave defender of the sheep. [1 Sam. xvii: 34-36](#). He did not *drive* them to water and to pasturage; but he called his own sheep by name, so familiar was he with every one of them, and he *led* them out, and went *before* them, and the sheep *followed* him, for they knew his voice. [Jno. x: 3, 4](#).

A relation so authoritative and at the same time so tender as this could not fail to find a place in the poetry of Hebrew prophets, and the parables of the Son of God. David's poetic eye detects the likeness between the shepherd's care of his flock and the care of God for Israel, and most beautifully does he give expression to it in lines familiar to every household, and admired in every land:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his names' sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." [Ps. xxiii](#).

The same beautiful image is employed by Isaiah, when with prophetic eye he sees the great Persian king gathering together the scattered sheep of Israel in distant Babylon, and sending them back from their long captivity. He exclaims in the name of the Lord, "Cyrus is my *shepherd*, and shall perform all my pleasures; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundations shall be laid." [xlv 28](#). But he sings a still sweeter note in the same strain, when he foresees the life and labors of the Son of God, and exclaims, "He shall feed his flock like a *shepherd*; he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." [xl: 11](#). The Savior himself re-echoes the sentiment, and says, "I am the good shepherd," "I know my sheep, and am known by mine." "I lay down my life for the sheep." [Jno. x: 14, 15](#). Even the less poetic Paul is touched by the beautiful metaphor, and makes a prayer to "the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of sheep," ([Heb. xiii: 20](#)); while Peter says to his brethren, "Ye *were* as sheep going astray; but now are returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." [1 Pet. ii: 25](#).

A word thus highly exalted by the pens of prophets, and even by the lips of Jesus, almost appears too sacred to represent the relation and responsibilities of an uninspired laborer in the cause of God. But even before the church came into existence it had been consecrated to this usage, and was a favorite term with the later prophets by which to designate the religious leaders of Israel. Jeremiah pronounces a woe upon the shepherds of his day who destroyed and scattered Israel, and predicts the time when God would bring the sheep again to their folds, and set up shepherds over them who would be real shepherds to them. [Jer. xxiii: 1-4](#). The connection shows that the prediction has reference to the Christian age. Ezekiel speaks in the same strain, and in almost the identical thoughts of Jeremiah, except that in contrast with the unfaithful shepherds of his age, he says: "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David: he shall feed them, he shall be their shepherd." [Ez. xxiv: 1-23](#).

With such a history, the word shepherd came into the terminology of the church with a most clearly defined secondary meaning. When applied as a title in the church it necessarily represented its subject as the ruler, the guide, the protector, and the companion of the members of the church. When Paul and Peter, therefore, exhorted the elders to be shepherds to the flock of God, all these important and tender relations were indicated by the word.

We have already taken notice of that general conception of the duties assigned the eldership, which is derived from the title applied to the office. In the confirmation of the conclusions drawn from this and overseer are enjoined upon the elder by express command.

In two distinct passages already quoted, ([Acts xx: 28](#); [1 Pet. v: 2](#)) the elders are exhorted to be *shepherds* to the church. This exhortation, or rather this apostolic command, has failed to make its due impression on the English reader, because of the very inadequate translation of *poimaino* in the common version. It occurs eleven times, and is [seven times](#) rendered *feed*, and [four times](#) *rule*. When connected with church work it is uniformly rendered *feed*. No doubt the translators intended by this rendering to make their version intelligible to their uneducated readers in England and Scotland, where very little is known of a shepherd's work except *feeding* the sheep through the long winters. But this attempt at adaptation has led to serious misapprehension; for even to this day, and in America as well as in Great Britain, the term *feed* in these passages has been understood by the masses as a metaphor for public teaching, and the whole work here enjoined is supposed to be accomplished when a suitable address is delivered to the saints on the Lord's day. Many an elder has imagined that the chief part of his work is accomplished when he has called together the flock once a week, or it may be once a month, and give them their regular supply of food, even when the food is given is nothing better than empty husks. And many an evangelist, miscalling himself a pastor, has labored under the same mistake. Let it be noted, then, and never be forgotten, that the term employed in these passages expressed *the entire work of a shepherd*, of which *feeding* was very seldom even a part in the country where this use of the term originated. The shepherds of Judea, and those of Asia Minor, *pastured* their sheep throughout the entire year. Their duty was to guide them from place to place to protect them from wild beast, and to keep them from straying; but not to *feed* them.

The Apostle Paul leaves us in no doubt as to his own use of the term in question; for after the general command, "Be shepherds to the church," he proceeds to distribute the idea by adding these words: "For I know this, that after my departure shall ravenous wolves enter in among you,

not sparing the flock. Also, of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, *watch*; and remember that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." [Acts xx: 28-31](#). Here, continuing the metaphor of the flock, he forewarns the shepherds against ravenous wolves, who can be no other than teachers of error who would come into Ephesus from abroad, such, for example, as those who had already infested the Galatian churches; ([Gal. i: 6-7; v: 12](#);) and he commands them to *watch*. He also predicts that men of their own number, like unruly rams of the flock, would rise up, speaking *perverse* things, and seeking to lead away disciples after them. The shepherds were to watch against these also, and as they saw symptoms of such movements, within, they were to "warn every one, night and day," as Paul had done.

Here, then, are two specifications under the generic idea of acting the shepherd, and they are strictly analogous to the work of the literal shepherd. It is made the duty of the eldership, *first*, to protect the congregation against false teachers from abroad; *second*, to guard carefully against the influence of schismatics within the congregation; *third*, to *keep watch* both within and without, like a shepherd night and day watching his flock, so as to be ready to act on the first appearance of danger from either direction.

(1) The Duty of the Eldership to protect the congregation against false teachers from abroad

The first of these duties is again emphasized in the epistle to Titus, where Paul requires that elders shall be able, by sound teaching, both to exhort and convict the gainsayers, and adds: "For there are many vain and unruly talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped." [Ti. i: 9-11](#). The duty of watchfulness is also mentioned again, and in a manner which shows most impressively its supreme importance. Paul says, "Obey them who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they *watch for your souls*, as they that must give account." [Heb. xiii: 17](#). From these words it appears that the object of the watching enjoined, is not merely to keep out false teaching and to suppress incipient schism, but to do these in order to save souls from being lost. That priceless treasure for which Jesus laid down his life is at stake, and the elders of each church, like the shepherds of each flock, must give account to the owner of the flock for every soul that is lost. The task of Jacob, concerning which he said to Laban, "That which was torn of beast I brought not to thee, I bore the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night," is a true symbol of the task assigned the shepherds of the Church of God. Well might they all exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

(2) The Duty of the Eldership to "take the oversight."

The duty of "taking oversight" is enjoined upon the elders in express terms, and the expression is used as the equivalent of acting the shepherd. Peter says, "*Be shepherds* to the flock, *taking the oversight thereof*." [1 Pet. v: 2](#). The essential thought in overseership, that of *ruling*, is frequently enjoined. Paul says to Timothy, "Let the elders that *rule well* be counted worthy of double honor." [1 Ti. v: 17](#). The Greek word here rendered *rule* is *proisteemi*, the etymological meaning of which is *to stand or place* one object *before* another. But the fact that rulers stand before their subjects, with all the eyes of the latter looking to them for

direction, led to the established usage of this term in the sense of ruling. It is so defined in the lexicons, and so used in both classic and Hellenistic Greek. It expresses the rule of a father over his family, [1 Ti. iii: 4-5, 12](#); of a deputy over a district, 1 Mac. v: 15; of a King over his subjects, Jos. Ant. viii: 1, 2, 3, and of the elders over the church, [1 Ti. v: 17](#); [1 Thess. v: 12](#); [Ro. xii: 5-8](#). By use of still another Greek word, Paul expresses in the epistle to the Hebrews the same general idea of ruling. He says: ([13: 7](#)), "Remember *them who have the rule over you*, who have spoken to you the word of God," again, ([verse 17](#)), "*Obey them that have the rule over you*, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account," &c.; and again, ([verse 24](#)), "Salute *them who have the rule over you*." The term here employed *hegeomai*, means primarily, *to lead*. When applied to the mind it means to think or suppose, because in this mental act the mind is *lead* to a conclusion. See [Acts xxvi: 2](#); [Phil. ii: 3-6](#); et al. But the *present participle* of this verb came to be used in the sense of *ruler*, because a ruler is one who *leads*, sometimes, indeed, it means a *leader* in the sense of a *chief man*, as when Silas and Judas are called "*chief men* among the brethren." [Acts xv: 22](#). When the idea of ruling is expressed by it, the fact is indicated in the context: e. g., Pharaoh made Joseph "*ruler (hegoumenon) over Egypt*," ([Acts vii: 10](#)), where the expression "*over Egypt*" indicates the relation of authority. So, in the second of the three examples under discussion, the terms *obey* and *submit yourselves* show that the relation of authority is expressed, and that the rendering of the participle should be *rulers*, or "*them who have ruled*."

(3) The Duty of the Eldership to teach.

Another duty of the eldership, distinct from the preceding, is that of *teaching*. By a mistake already mentioned, this duty has been supposed by many to be the chief work indicated by the term pastor or shepherd; but in the only place where the latter term occurs in the common version in its appropriated sense pastors are distinguished from teachers. "He gave some, apostles and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some *pastors* and *teachers*." The distinction here evidently made between pastors and teachers, does not imply that they are always different persons; for as one person might be both a prophet and an evangelist, so, for the same reason, he might be both a pastor and a teacher. But the distinction made shows that one might be a teacher and not a pastor. From other passages, however, we know that all pastors or shepherds, in addition to what is implied in this title, are also *teachers*. In the statement of their qualifications, Paul says that they must be "apt to teach," [1 Ti. iii: 2](#); and that they should be "able, by sound teaching, both to exhort and to convict the gainsayers;" [Ti. i: 9](#). That they should be able to teach, necessarily implies the duty of teaching.

II. HIS ROLE AS AN EXAMPLE

Having pointed out, and stated in general terms, the duties of the office, we now inquire as to the manner in which these duties are performed. We will be led by this inquiry to consider more in detail the duties themselves, seeing that an essential part of every duty is the prescribed method of performing it.

Having collected together, and placed in a single group before me, all the Scripture specifications on this subject, I feel constrained to recognize as first of them all, the requirement that elders

shall be examples to those over whom they are called to preside. It is not only required of them that they be examples, but being examples is as an essential element in the manner of executing their official duties. Peter exhorts Elders in these words: "Be shepherds to 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 examples to the flock." "Being examples to the flock" is one of the specifications of the manner of taking the oversight. The Apostle Paul indicates the same though, when, in the beginning of his admonitions to the Ephesian Elders, the charge, "Take heed to yourselves" is made to precede the charge, "Take heed to all the flock." [Acts xx: 28](#). He also holds the Elders up to the brethren as an example to be imitated, when he says, "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their behavior." [Heb. xiii: 7](#). Here faith is considered as to its practical working in the behavior, and the Greek word rendered *follow*, means, more strictly, *imitate*. The disciples are required to *imitate* in behavior the faith of those who rule over them; and thus, indirectly, but most forcibly, these rulers are admonished that their example must be worthy of imitation. It is assumed, indeed, as a fact, the evidence of which should never be in doubt, that an example is actually presented in the lives of the Elders.

Jesus teaches the same idea under the figure of a shepherd and his flock. He says of the shepherd, "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him." ([John x: 4](#).) There is no driving, but constant leading. A Judean shepherd going before his flock and calling them with a voice which they know and always follow, is an inimitably beautiful picture of the chief Shepherd himself, and of all the under shepherds, leading their flocks toward the gates of heaven. That voice never directed to a path which the shepherd himself did not tread; and even if it did the sheep would take no heed to it but ever followed the footsteps of the shepherd. How fearfully important that those footsteps should never vary from the strait and narrow way!

These admonitions are expressed in general terms, and cover all the duties of a christian life. To be examples to the flock, to go before and call the flock to follow after, is to present a model not of one but of every virtue. To be worthy of imitation in faith and behavior, is to be free from habits that would be avoided. Shall we be content with the statement of these generalities, or shall we enter into details? Perhaps the Elder who reads this will think that the demands made upon him are sufficiently exacting even in these general terms; but at the risk of exciting his fears, and the further risk of some repetition hereafter, we venture to specify **some of the items of behavior which constitute this example.**

(1) To not be Greedy

We revert again to Paul's conversation with the Ephesian Elders, and find him committing to them the following charge: "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." [Acts xx: 33-35](#). Thus the Elders are required, in addition to their labors for the church, to imitate Paul's example, and, by diligent attention to business, help to support the

weak. and to exemplify the blessedness of giving. The importance of this is clearly seen in the fact, that Elders must teach the brethren to practice liberality, and must see to the enforcement of the law of God upon the covetous; neither of which is practicable unless they themselves set an example of liberality. For this reason also, in the directions to both Timothy and Titus, Paul prescribes that Elders shall not be "greedy of filthy lucre;" and Peter directs that they shall take the oversight "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." They are to keep themselves free from the appearance of sordid motives in their official action, as well as in their secular business. This forbid doing any official duty with a view to promoting business enterprises and equally forbids neglect of duty when the performance of it would involve pecuniary loss. An Elder whose secular business depends upon popular favor is tempted in both these directions. He must keep himself pure and above suspicion.

(2) To maintain a blameless reputation.

In the second place, the Elder is required to maintain a blameless reputation; [1 Tim. iii: 2; Ti. i: 7](#). This includes a great deal. He must not be "selfwilled;" for this excites self-will in those with whom he must deal, and causes them to speak evil of him. He must not be "soon angry," for the same reason. And for the additional reason that the moment he becomes angry he loses all his moral power over those whom he is seeking to influence. He must not be "given to wine," for it is disreputable, and will render him powerless in his efforts to control the intemperate. If the Elder drinks a little, his words will be like the idle winds to those who drink much. He must be "a lover of good men," for he will be judged by the company he keeps. He must be "sober", lest his levity should deprive him of weight; "just," lest he be suspected of dishonesty and partiality; "holy," lest his exhortations to holiness appear to be the cant of a hypocrite. All these specifications, and more, are made by the apostles, and the Elder must not content himself a moment without the possession of them all.

If any Elder who reads this, after searching carefully into his own life, finds that he is not, in some good degree, setting the example herein described, let him at once either resign his position or amend his ways. It is a fearful thing to be placed in a position the very nature of which proclaims one an example to the church of God, if the example actually exhibited is not a good one. O that the great Shepherd and Overseer of all may guide the under shepherds, and help them to go before their flocks in the unerring pathway of truth and holiness.

III. HIS ROLE AS A SHEPHERD

The titles applied to the Eldership are well chosen, and constitute an exhaustive classification of its duties. When the Elders learn how to be shepherds, how to be overseers, and how to be teachers, they have learned how to discharge all the functions of their office. We propose now to inquire how they may perform those duties which belong to them as shepherds.

All the duties of a literal shepherd, as understood by the people who gave the word its religious significance, are embraced in these three: 1. To keep the sheep from straying. 2. To lead them to water and pasturage by day, and back to the fold, when need be, at night. 3. To protect them against all danger by night and by day. The pastoral, or shepherd duties of the Eldership, as the

nature of the title shepherd and the apostolic precepts both require, correspond strictly to these three.

(1) Prevent individual sheep from straying.

First then, in order to be a good shepherd, the Elder must exercise the utmost care to prevent individual sheep from straying away from the flock; and when one, as it sometimes will, eludes all vigilance and strays away, he is to be prompt and energetic in going out to search for it and bring it back. Jesus, with special reference to his own work in hunting up the lost sheep of the house of Israel, beautifully illustrates this duty by a parable. He says to those who condemned him for receiving sinners, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep. If he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine, and go after that which is lost till he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing; and when he cometh home he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance." What can be the meaning of this parable, unless it be that when a disciple strays away from the path of duty, the very first obligation of the shepherd, rising above all the obligations at that moment due to the faithful brethren is to go and hunt up, and try to win back, the wanderer? He is to leave the ninety and nine, even in the wilderness, and go. If a congregation were assembled on the Lord's day for worship, and the Elders, upon looking over their faces, were to miss one, and ascertain that he was absent in some gay company, or at home in an ill humor, or about to start out for the day on a pleasure excursion, would they be pressing the teaching of this parable too far, should one of them immediately leave the house of God, and go to bring in that person? How much joy it would create among the saints on earth, and among the angels in heaven, if such a thing were done successfully and often! Should any one, however, be unwilling to press the analogy to this extent, he must still admit that the nearest possible approach to this degree of vigilance can alone meet fully the demands of the shepherd's duty.

Such reflections make it very painful to look abroad at the well known condition of many congregations--the sheep scattered far and wide through the wilderness, and the shepherds eating and drinking, or asleep on the ground. Oh, that we had some Jeremiah to lift up his voice against the unfaithful shepherds of the flock of God!

If such vigilance as we have named is needed in hunting up those who wander away, how much more is needed to *prevent* such wandering? The good Shepherd will endeavor to have as little of the former work to do as possible, by doing more of the latter. When the disposition of wander is discovered, he will be prompt to counteract it. All this requires constant watchfulness and inquiry on the part of each Elder, and very frequent consultations of the board of Elders. We will speak of the latter more fully at another time.

(2) To lead the flock by example.

Secondly, we have already spoken sufficiently for the purposes of this treatise, on this second class of the shepherd's duties. To lead the flock whither they should go, by going before, and

calling them to follow, is simply to be an example to the flock, as we have stated and endeavored to enforce in a former section.

(3) To protect the church against foes.

Thirdly. The duty of protecting the church against foes both from within and from without, is not only implied in the title of shepherd, but specifically enjoined by Paul in a passage already cited more than once. He warns the Ephesian Elders that ravenous wolves would come in among them, not sparing the flock; and that schismatics would spring up within, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them; and says to them, "Therefore watch." They must watch, then, against these two dangers, and this makes the Elders the proper guardians of the church against false teachers and schismatics.

In order to discharge faithfully this duty, they must scrupulously avoid any action on their own part which would unnecessarily excite faction in the church, and when they find any man showing the slightest disposition to be a factionist, they must bring to bear upon him promptly every good influence which can be devised to prevent the anticipated evil. They must also know every man whom they invite or allow to address the brethren at their stated meetings. They must deny this privilege to every stranger who comes among them unrecommended, and every man whom they know to be a promoter of dissension and a teacher of false doctrine. A very small wolf in sheep's clothing can scatter a large flock of sheep, and a very feeble man in the shape of a Soul-sleeper or Universalist can sometimes disaffect and ruin many souls; and a man who teaches nothing false, but aims at strife and division can often do more harm than a false teacher. With a firmness, then, that knows no yielding, but with a caution and prudence which guards against unjust judgment, must the shepherd watch the door which opens into their folds.

IV. HIS ROLE AS AN OVERSEER

The term overseer is more generic, as an official title, than the term shepherd, because the duties of a secular overseer are more numerous than those of a shepherd. The overseer of a farm, of a factory, of a city, of any company of men, takes cognizance of all that concerns the business of the men who are under his oversight. All that concerns the church, therefore, as a body of disciples, must be under the care of the overseers thereof, unless we find some limitations assigned in the word of God. If we attempt, however, to discriminate between those duties which belong to overseers and those which belong to the same men in the capacity of shepherds, we may separate in thought the latter from the former. Omitting from our present view, therefore, all that we have included in the title shepherd, and reserving for its proper place all that is included in the work of teaching, we will attempt to classify and consider briefly those duties which remain to the elders as overseers.

When a church acts as a body, it must usually do so through its proper organs. There are very few acts of the church which are or can be performed by the simultaneous and equal action of all the members. If they pray, one leads and the others unite silently in the petitions: if they sing, one leads and the others sing in unison with him; if they break the loaf, one returns thanks, others pass the loaf around, and all partake; if they feed the poor, all contribute and a few distribute; if

they speak as a body to other churches or to the world, they speak through a spokesman. In all cases of church action, in which the church as a whole cannot act, it is a necessity that she act through her proper officers; and from this it follows, that the overseers of the church must take the lead in all actions of this kind, which are not exclusively assigned to some other officers. Among these duties we find the following:

(1) To preserve order in the church.

First, it is enjoined upon the church, "Let all things be done decently and in order." [1 Cor. 14:40](#). This injunction necessarily requires each member to act decently and orderly the part which is assigned to him; but in order that each may do so it is, necessary that some one shall assign each his proper part, and exercise such superintendence as will insure the order required. Moreover, it is requisite that some one shall decide, where the apostles have not prescribed some order, what order shall be observed, and what shall constitute the decency of its observance. Undoubtedly the congregation itself is, from the nature of the case, the chief authority in these matters; but the congregation must have a mouth piece by which to speak, and an arm by which to execute; and seeing that there are overseers of the church, this labor most naturally devolves on them. To preserve, therefore, such order in the church as the apostles have prescribed, or such as the church may have agreed upon, and to secure the utmost attainable decorum in all the public procedure of the church, is one way in which to act as an overseer.

(2) To see that what is done public worship is so executed as to edify the body.

Second, and near akin to the above, it is commanded in reference to the public worship, "Let all things be done to edifying." [1 Cor. 14:26](#). For the same reasons as in the former case, it must devolve on the overseers to secure the practical observance of this precept. Of course they can not secure it without a proper regard for the precept on the part of the congregation; but even when each one desires that what is done shall be edifying, the end is not always attainable without the guidance and direction of someone possessing superior judgment, and to whom, by common consent, the general control of the public exercises shall be committed. The overseers, then, by force of their office, must see to it that what is done in the house of worship, including the singing, the teaching, the tongues, the revelations and the interpretations, (the apostle enumerates all these) shall be so executed as to edify the body. This requires the utmost good judgment on their part, as to what will edify, and the utmost delicacy in advising the participants, in the various acts of worship, so as to secure the desired compliance.

(3) To make sure withdrawal from those who walk disorderly takes place.

In the third place, the church is required to withdraw from those who walk disorderly. [2 Thes. iii: 6](#). In this act of withdrawal, and in the steps which must be taken antecedent to it, the overseers or rulers must take the leading part. When a brother trespasses against another, and the private steps have been taken which the Savior prescribes, the matter is to be told to the church, the church is to speak, and if the offender hear not the church, he is to be treated as a heathen and a publican. [Matt. xviii: 15-17](#). Now, the church may hear accusations as a

body, or hear them, through her appointed overseers; but when she undertakes to persuade and warn and entreat the accused, she is confined to the latter medium, and for the sake of decency and order, she has found it necessary also to hear accusations only through the same medium. To the overseer, then, as the proper organ through which the church take action in the case, must all accusations be presented.

Again, while it is the duty of the elders in their capacity as shepherds, to seek all the straying members, and to bring them back, if possible, to their duty, they must necessarily sometimes fail in this effort, and then begins their work as overseers. The wanderer is found incorrigible, and is walking disorderly, notwithstanding all proper efforts to bring him to repentance. The church must now withdraw from him as from those who will not hear the church; and upon the overseers devolves the duty of seeing that this withdrawal takes place.

Let it be observed here, that the duty of withdrawing from the disorderly is enjoined, not upon the overseers, but upon the church at large, and the overseers become connected with it, as leading actors, only by virtue of their official relation to the church. It is an act in which the whole church can participate, but in which they must have an arm and a mouthpiece. That the mass of the church did participate in the apostolic age, is evident from the directions given to the church in Corinth about withdrawing from the incestuous man. Paul says, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." [1 Cor. v: 3-5](#). In this case the punishment was inflicted by the majority ([2 Cor. ii: 6](#)), a minority no doubt refusing, under the influence of Paul's enemies, to obey the commandment of the apostle. The facts, however, demonstrate that the whole church should, in cases of exclusion, be assembled together, and in some decent and orderly manner, deliver the offender over to Satan.