

It is plain there was a plurality of such elders in every church. These formed the eldership or presbytery of that church. In the church of Jerusalem when met for government, we find just the apostles, extraordinary officers, the elders, ordinary officers, and the brethren or church members who listened to their deliberations, and to whom their decision seemed good. We know there were deacons in that church; but their office was not rule, and therefore they are not named. The church of Philippi, which was set in order by the Apostle, was composed of "the saints in Christ Jesus," the private members; "with the bishops," overseers; elders, who ruled; and "the deacons," who served."¹

While the entire spiritual charge of the church was committed to the presbytery or meeting of elders, what we are in the habit of calling the session, there is evidence, not that the elders were divided into a pastor or pastors who only taught, and bishops who ruled; but that, while all the elders severally and in a body superintended and ruled, there were some of these elders "who laboured in word and doctrine," devoting themselves chiefly to the exposition and enforcement of the doctrine and law of our Lord Jesus.

It is comparatively a modern, at any rate it is not a New Testament usage, to apply the term pastor exclusively to those teaching elders, that term naturally expressing the whole work of the Christian eldership; and, like the kindred term bishop, being given in the New Testament to Christian elders indiscriminately. But that such a distinction as that between elders who taught and ruled, and elders who only ruled, existed from the beginning, is made probable by the reasonableness and almost necessity of the arrangement, and its obvious tendency to secure the gaining in the best way and in the greatest degree the ends of the Christian eldership; and appears to me proved by the passage in the first Epistle to Timothy, v. 17, of which, after all that has been said for the purpose of reconciling it to the episcopal

¹ Phil. i. 1.

or independent order of church polity, I am disposed to say with Dr Owen, that "on the first proposal of this text, that 'the elders who rule well are worthy of double honours, especially those who labour in word and doctrine,' a rational man who is unprejudiced, who never heard of the controversy about ruling elders, can hardly avoid an apprehension that there are two sorts of elders; some of whom labour in word and doctrine, and some who do not so."

§ 2. *Qualifications of Christian elders.*

With regard to the qualifications which are necessary for filling the office of a Christian elder, we have full information in the Epistles of Paul to Timothy and Titus. "This is a true saying," says he, in his first Epistle to Timothy, iii. 1, "If a man desire the office of a bishop," an overseer, an elder, in the Christian church, "he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, nor covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own family, how shall he take care of the house" the family "of God? Not a novice," a late convert, "lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of those who are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." "Ordain elders," says he to Titus, "in every city, as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince gainsayers." These are qualifications which are requisite in all elders, though some