Articles by Henry Hitchman

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First published in Food for the Flock / Ministry in Focus (Food for the Flock, Inc., Ontario, Canada).

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Liberty in Ministry (September–October 1971)

From Ministry in Focus, September–October 1971. Text as published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Liberty In Ministry

Henry Hitchman

We are indebted to our colleague Ormer G. C. Sprunt for submitting this article. It is taken from the writings of Henry Hitchman because it contains principles which need to be reviewed frequently.

Special gifts from the risen Head of the Church are needed and supplied by Him for public ministry of His Word, that the saints may be edified, exhorted, and comforted (1 Cor. 14:3; Eph. 4:1-13). These gifts vary according to the service to be rendered in His Name. Evangelists are given to preach the gospel; pastors to shepherd the Lord’s flock; teachers to unfold the Word to the saints for their nourishment and to produce maturity in their characters. These distinct gifts may exist alone in any one person, or may be combined according to the pleasure of the Lord who bestows them (Acts 21:8; 11:23-26). It is very important to know what gifts have been bestowed, and to use them as the Lord directs (Acts 8:26-40). The bestowment of these gifts may cause brethren to be entirely separated for the work of the Lord; such as evangelists, missionaries, teachers, etc.; or they may be possessed by brethren who continue to follow their earthly callings: professional, business, or working men (Acts 13:1-3).

These gifts may exist with education, or apart from it, as history fully proves. It was perceived that Peter and John were bold, though “unlearned and ignorant;” yet, filled with the Holy Ghost they did mighty deeds in the Name of the Lord (Acts 4:13-14). Education has its advantage, but there is need of warning in regard to an educated ministry. This may lead to unscriptural institutions to train for it, and deprive uneducated men from exercising the gift given them by the divine Head of the Church. Intellectualism may take the place of the Holy Spirit. It produces a ministry as barren as illiteracy, and accompanied with far more disastrous results as may be seen in Christendom’s systems of religion.

Because a brother has the gift of an evangelist, it does not necessarily follow that he can teach believers, or that he should take the platform at conferences. Many servants of Christ out in the work have less ability to edify than some who follow their daily callings. This does not prove that many of the Lord’s servants have mistaken their calling (although this is quite possible), or that business men should give up their occupation: “To every man his work” (Mark 13:34).

When the Lord leads His people to arrange conferences or meetings for ministry, He can be counted upon to have in their midst those whom He has qualified to minister to edification. These distinct gifts are generally known among the saints, who have been helped by them on past occasions. If there is due waiting upon God, without hurry or restlessness of the flesh, these gifts will be raised up and become channels of ministry from the Head to the saints. They will thus be fed, refreshed, instructed, and matured for ministry themselves. Liberty in ministry is confined entirely to the spirit. He is not

likely to select those who have no qualification for the particular work. It is well known that the majority of brethren in nearly every assembly do not possess gift for public ministry, and yet many persist in taking the platform and wearing out the saints by profitless talk. By so doing they waste valuable time and money. These brethren seem to think that because they are not sisters they have the liberty to minister. They little know the sorrow they cause God's saints.

All should understand that the meetings are only open for ministry from those who have a distinct gift, and who enjoy the confidence of saints generally, and especially of the responsible brethren who convene the meetings.

A brother may have gift to edify a small local company of saints, but not sufficient to profit a large conference or gathering at all-day meetings. Through profitless ministry believers have often gone away not to converse upon the good things they have heard, but rather upon the wasted time.

In spite of our many failures God has met us in grace, and we would not be unmindful of His great goodness to His people in conferences and all-day meetings. Nothing short of conforming to the divine pattern, and to receiving from God His best should satisfy the hearts of believers, believers whose earnest desire is to be well-pleasing unto the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

Can the Scriptures provide anything for the saints when gathered for ministry, through an absolutely open platform where any brother may speak, a platform which gives room for much that is evidently not of God, or through a closed platform which would exclude valuable gifts given by the Head for ministry? Surely, as

neither of these is according to the Word of God, a scriptural remedy ought to be found. Does it not lie in the recognition of the special gifts given for the direct purpose of ministry, and making room for the exercise of the same? Such recognition would correct the abuse which exists in many places, arising out of the open platform being taken advantage of by misguided and self-willed brethren. At the same time it would avoid the necessity for a closed platform and for selected speakers, which frequently hinder the Spirit's liberty and mar the fellowship between assemblies of saints.

'Stand fast… by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:1-13).