

Gospel Order

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

“There is order in heaven, and it is to be imitated by those upon earth who are heirs of salvation.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 697, 698.

Suggested Reading: *Early Writings*, pp. 97–104.

1. The Paramount Ways of God

- a. What does God say about the difference between our ways and His ways? Isaiah 55:8, 9.
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a. Isaiah 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

1. The Paramount Ways of God

- b. In all our plans to conduct the work of God, what should we take into serious consideration? Ephesians 6:6.
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“As a people we should study God’s plans for conducting His work. Wherever He has given directions in regard to any point, we should carefully consider how to regard His expressed will.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 342.

- b. Ephesians 6:6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

1. The Paramount Ways of God

- c. Describe Paul's attitude and that of the other apostles regarding gospel order. 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2.
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"Paul stood firm for the right. He realized that the church must never be brought under the control of human power. The traditions and maxims of men must not take the place of revealed truth. . . . While looking to God for direct guidance, he was ever ready to recognize the authority vested in the body of believers united in church fellowship. He felt the need of counsel, and when matters of importance arose, he was glad to lay these before the church and to unite with his brethren in seeking God for wisdom to make right decisions."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 199, 200.

- c. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

2. Organization in Old Testament Times

- a. What counsel did Jethro give to his son-in-law, Moses, and why? Exodus 18:14-22.
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“God is a God of order. Everything connected with heaven is in perfect order; subjection and thorough discipline mark the movements of the angelic host. Success can only attend order and harmonious action. God requires order and system in His work now no less than in the days of Israel. All who are working for Him are to labor intelligently, not in a careless, haphazard manner. He would have his work done with faith and exactness, that He may place the seal of His approval upon it.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 376.

a. Exodus 18:14-22 And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? 15 And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: 16 When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws. 17 And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. 18 Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. 19 Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: 20 And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. 21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: 22 And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.

2. Organization in Old Testament Times

- b. Specify the four main qualities to be sought in the men chosen to carry responsibilities in the camp of Israel. Exodus 18:21.
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“[Exodus 18:19–23 quoted.] This counsel is for us. . . . In His instruction to Moses the Lord very plainly set forth the character of those who were to fill important positions as counselors. They are to be ‘able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness.’ The Lord’s counsel has been strangely neglected.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 341.

- b. Exodus 18:21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:

2. Organization in Old Testament Times

- c. Why was Balaam constrained to pronounce blessings upon Israel, while his mind was filled with curses? Numbers 23:8, 9. On what basis would Israel be blessed? Deuteronomy 4:1, 6–9.
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“As Balaam looked upon the encampment of Israel he beheld with astonishment the evidence of their prosperity. They had been represented to him as a rude, disorganized multitude, infesting the country in roving bands that were a pest and terror to the surrounding nations; but their appearance was the reverse of all this. He saw the vast extent and perfect arrangement of their camp, everything bearing the marks of thorough discipline and order. He was shown the favor with which God regarded Israel, and their distinctive character as His chosen people. They were not to stand upon a level with other nations, but to be exalted above them all.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 447.

c. Numbers 23:8-9 How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? 9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

Deuteronomy 4:1 Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you.

Deuteronomy 4:6-9 Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. 7 For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? 8 And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? 9 Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;

3. Organization in the New Testament Church

- a. For what purpose does God give gifts and grace to every one of His servants? Ephesians 4:7, 8, 11, 12.
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“In our several callings there is to be a mutual dependence on one another for assistance.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 491.

a. Ephesians 4:7-8 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

3. Organization in the New Testament Church

- b. In order for the Lord's work to succeed in our midst, what must characterize our spirit? 1 Corinthians 12:21, 25; Ephesians 4:16. To what error should they close the door?
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“Let us each wait on the Lord, and He will teach us how to labor. He will reveal to us the work that we are best adapted to perform. This will not lead men to start out in an independent spirit, to promulgate new theories. In this time when Satan is seeking to make void the law of God through the exaltation of false science, we need to guard most carefully against everything that would tend to lessen our faith and scatter our forces. As laborers together with God, we should be in harmony with the truth and with our brethren. There should be counsel and cooperation.”—Ibid., p. 490.

“The spirit of pulling away from our fellow laborers, the spirit of disorganization, is in the very air we breathe. By some, all efforts to establish order are regarded as dangerous—as a restriction of personal liberty, and hence to be feared as popery.”—Ibid., p. 488.

b. 1 Corinthians 12:21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

1 Corinthians 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

Ephesians 4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

3. Organization in the New Testament Church

- c. How should the followers of Christ respect one another? 1 Peter 5:5, 6.
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“Among God’s people are some who have had long experience in His work, men who have not departed from the faith. Notwithstanding the great trials through which they have passed, they have remained faithful. These men should be regarded as tried and chosen counselors. They should be respected, and their judgment should be honored by those who are younger or who have had less experience, even though these younger men may be in official positions.”—Ibid., p. 497.

- c. 1 Peter 5:5-6 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. 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

4. Unselfish Servants

- a. What standard are we to adopt in ordaining church officers?
Titus 1:5–9.
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“Solemn are the responsibilities resting upon those who are called to act as leaders in the church of God on earth.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 92.

“In the work of setting things in order in all the churches, and ordaining suitable men to act as officers, the apostles held to the high standards of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures.”—*Ibid.*, p. 95.

“The church should feel their responsibility and should look carefully and attentively at the lives, qualifications, and general course of those who profess to be teachers. If unmistakable evidence is not given that God has called them, and that the ‘woe’ is upon them if they heed not this call, it is the duty of the church to act and let it be known that these persons are not acknowledged as teachers by the church.”—*Early Writings*, p. 100.

“Those who profess to be the ministers of Jesus should be men of experience and deep piety, and then at all times and in all places they can shed a holy influence.”—*Ibid.*, p. 103.

“Suffering, want, despondency, misery, unbelief, the ministers of God will meet every day. Their work is not a work of self-pleasing. Many, many souls are unsaved. Fasten yourselves by faith to the Lord and tell sinners that the Saviour is calling for them.”—*The Review and Herald*, July 26, 1898.

a. Titus 1:5-9 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: 6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

4. Unselfish Servants

- b. What did the apostle Peter say to the elders of the church regarding their responsibilities as undershepherds of Christ's flock? 1 Peter 5:1-5.
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“Those who occupy the position of undershepherds are to exercise a watchful diligence over the Lord's flock. This is not to be a dictatorial vigilance, but one that tends to encourage and strengthen and uplift. Ministry means more than sermonizing; it means earnest, personal labor.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 526.

“In connection with his instruction to those in positions of trust in the church, the apostle outlined some general principles that were to be followed by all who were associated in church fellowship. The younger members of the flock were urged to follow the example of their elders in the practice of Christlike humility”—*Ibid.*, pp. 527, 528.

b. 1 Peter 5:1-5 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: 2 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; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. 5 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.

5. Self-Sent Messengers

- a. What work is God doing in behalf of His children in these last days? What stratagem is Satan using to hinder the Lord's work? Romans 16:17, 18; Acts 20:27-30.
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"Now in these last days, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith, there is more real need of order than ever before; for, as God unites His children, Satan and his evil angels are very busy to prevent this unity and to destroy it. Therefore men are hurried into the field who lack wisdom and judgment, perhaps not ruling well their own house, and not having order or government over the few that God has given them charge of at home; yet they feel capable of having charge of the flock."—*Early Writings*, p. 97.

"Men whose lives are not holy and who are unqualified to teach the present truth enter the field without being acknowledged by the church or the brethren generally, and confusion and disunion are the result."—*Ibid.*

a. Romans 16:17-18 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Acts 20:27-30 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

5. Self-Sent Messengers

- b. Which is easier—to go into places that have been spoiled by self-sent messengers or to enter new fields?
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“It is much more wearing to the spirits of God’s messengers to go into places where those have been who have exerted [a] wrong influence than to enter new fields.”—Ibid., p. 99.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What qualities should be evident in those who are selected for God's work?
2. Why does God give gifts and grace to every one of His servants?
3. What attitude must we all manifest towards one another to ensure the success of the Lord's work in our midst?
4. What standard did the apostles adopt in ordaining officers for the church?
5. What is the warning of Paul in Acts 20:27-30?