

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”

Heb. 13:8

CIRCULAR LETTER

September 1972

Heartfelt greetings to you all in the precious name of the Lord with the Word from Isaiah 54:14-15 and 17:

"In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake ... No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."

We may be certain that God fights for us when we stand on His side. We are in the midst of a spiritual battle, but the Lord has already defeated all the powers of the enemy. We need not be dismayed nor fear; we say with full confidence: ***"If God be for us, who can be against us"*** [Romans 8:31] and ***"... what can man do unto me?"*** [Psalm 118:6] No weapon that is formed against God's people shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against the elect shall be condemned. This is the inheritance of those who believe and trust God from the heart.

Mission report

In recent months, I once again had the opportunity to see how God is bringing about a revival in many countries. Whether it is up in Finland or down in Sicily, in Europe or on other continents, people everywhere testify that they have been provided with the long awaited for spiritual food revealed by God through His Word. Brother Branham's sermons are available on tape and in written form in various languages. God ensures that His Word does not return void and reveals it to His own through the

Holy Spirit. The biblical truths shine in the bright light of God like never before. Unfortunately, we cannot provide a detailed account here of what God is doing for so many.

Questions — Answers

In recent months, the Lord showed me the necessity of laying the foundation for the building up of the church from a biblical perspective. Amongst brothers, the question often arises: "How can someone know if they are called by God to the ministry and what their tasks are in the Kingdom of God, how are elders appointed, and what prerequisites must be met?"

So far, I have deliberately not addressed these questions because I only received the commission from the Lord to go from city to city and proclaim the Word revealed by God. I have not yet received the instruction to establish local churches or appoint elders. It is my perception that from this final and conclusive proclamation of the Word, no particular faith, but rather the general assembly of Jesus Christ, which will be raptured. Nevertheless, with regard to existing congregations, I cannot evade the responsibility of proclaiming the entire counsel of God, which also includes the order of church up-building, in order to show how the various ministries within the congregation are effective.

The Church of Jesus Christ

The church of Jesus Christ is not a human organization, but a creative act of God. Christ said, "**... I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**" [Matthew 16:18] The creation and founding of the church of Jesus Christ is an act of God. His congregation is subject solely to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Human interpretations and dogmas have no place in it. The founding and building up of the first christian congregations, as set forth in the Scriptures, serve as the standard.

In a special way, we want to highlight the five ministries and the appointment of elders to show the function of the offices in the church. According to Ephesians 4:11-12, God has appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers in the church. These five ministries are intended to edify the body of Christ and to furnish the holy ones for the work of the ministry. Where these five offices are lacking, there can be no talk of exercising the ministries of the church and edification of the body of Christ. God gave these five ministries to the entire church, and therefore a divine calling is necessary for them. No apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, or teacher is called or elected by a congregation, but as it is written: ***"God hath set some in the church"*** [1 Corinthians 12:28]

In the New Testament church, we first find the ministry of the apostles, for the Lord has entrusted them with the secrets of His Word. Everything that was revealed to the Old Testament prophets concerning the plan of salvation was fulfilled over the course of the New Testament church ages. The apostles had a particularly deep insight into God's Plan of Salvation and were commissioned by Him to inform the congregation whatever they had received from the Lord. Paul values his apostleship so highly that he introduces himself as such at the beginning of his letters. To the Romans he writes: ***"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)"***

In 1 Corinthians 1 he writes: ***"Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, . . ."***

In 2 Corinthians 1, Galatians 1, Ephesians 1, and Colossians 1, he writes almost the same words. In Titus 1, he says: ***"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth..."*** From these words, it becomes clear that Paul does not emphasize an evangelistic ministry, but rather underscores his commission for the faith of God's elect and for the knowledge of the truth. If today a servant of God were to introduce himself at the beginning of a letter or a sermon as Paul did, one would have

the impression that it was inappropriate. But Paul deemed it right, led by the Spirit of God, to place his divine calling and divine commission right at the beginning of his letters. This fact is only intended to point out that he, as a man of God, represents and expounds the divine viewpoint. What he presents of the Plan of Salvation from a prophetic perspective is just as binding as what he writes down doctrinally. God has also shown him the ordinances for the congregation: Baptism, Lord's Supper, the use of spiritual gifts, or the appointment of elders in the local congregations.

Who has a part in the up-building of the Church?

In 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, the diverse workings of the Holy Spirit in the individual members of the congregation of Jesus Christ are described. This very word is like a mirror in which we can look at ourselves to determine how we stand. Here we read in verse 7: ***"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal."***

Every child of God is taken hold of by the work of the Holy Spirit and to all of them the revelation of the Spirit has been granted so that all may benefit. From verse 8, we find the ninefold work of the Holy Spirit described, which is revealed in the unfolding of the nine spiritual gifts. In verse 11 it says: ***"But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."*** It is the biblical testimony that everyone who belongs to the congregation of Jesus Christ partakes in the work of the Holy Spirit.

The true church as the body of Christ

In 1 Corinthians 12:12, the church is described as the spiritual body consisting of many members. The members of the body are diverse, yet they belong together, are dependent on one another, and are joined to the Head. The entire body of Christ is endued with the life of Christ and furnished with His power. In verse 13, it says that we were all baptized into one body and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. This is the tes-

timony of the Holy Scripture. Every true believer is baptized into the church of the living God by the Holy Spirit and is thereby subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit. All members of the body of Jesus Christ will respect and acknowledge each other despite their differences, for together they form one body and are subject to Christ, the Head.

God has appointed

We read in 1 Corinthians 12:28: ***"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers..."***

We see, therefore, that the church is not founded by man, but by Jesus Christ. We also recognize that not everything that is called a church of the Lord is indeed one. This biblical exposition is intended to help everyone conduct a self-examination to determine whether they truly belong to the church of Jesus Christ. As in Ephesians 4:11, it is also stated here that God has appointed in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, and so on. All who belong to the church of Jesus Christ respect the divine order and acknowledge the ministry of a servant sent by God. Whether it is the office of an apostle, the ministry of a prophet, or a teacher, whatever God has appointed for the edification of the church is gratefully accepted by all who belong to the body of Jesus Christ. Generally, the ministry of a shepherd and evangelist is recognized. However, the situation is different with the first three ministries. Nonetheless, God has deemed these offices necessary and appointed them for the edification of the church.

In Acts 13, verse 1, we read: ***"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers;"*** The servants of God are then named. During a worship service, the Holy Ghost said: ***"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."*** It should be noted that hands were laid on the apostles for guidance, but not for the establishing of their ministry, for they had long been confirmed by God. In verse 4 it says: ***"So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed..."*** This is what we need in our time: men of

God whose calling and commission are revealed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the congregation before they can set out.

Often one hears the saying today: "We have Christ and therefore we need neither apostles nor prophets." Does one intend to say that the early christian church did not have Christ, and therefore, God appointed apostles, prophets, teachers, and so on? Does one want to say that the church in Antioch did not have Christ because there prophets and teachers performed their ministries under the leading of the Holy Spirit? The opposite is the case. Every congregation that truly has Jesus Christ will also have the establishment of ministries and offices.

The ministry of an apostle largely consists of going out into the mission field and not only proclaiming the gospel, as an evangelist might, but staying in one place until a church is established and elders can be appointed. The ministry of a prophet in the New Testament church consists of expounding the prophetic word of the Lord's congregation in its divine significance. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:29: ***"Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."***

Why is such a reference given in the Bible if a practical follow-through of the prophetic office were not planned by God? That this is not about the gift of prophecy is clearly evident from the context, for it is written: "If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace until the revelation is given, and then he can continue speaking." However, no one can ever be interrupted during a prophecy. A prophecy is a direct speaking of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:6: ***"... what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?"*** Most people only have the notion of a prophet as someone who either foretells future things or reveals some-

thing present that concerns the church. However, the prophetic ministry in the New Testament reveals itself in a variety of ways, particularly in communicating the prophetic word to the congregation in the correct manner under the inspiration and revelation of the Holy Spirit. Often, the ministry of an apostle, prophet, and teacher is found to be interconnected.

A meeting on Sunday, June 4, 1972, in the meeting hall in Krefeld. The choir was on the platform when the picture was taken.

In 2 Timothy 1:11, Paul writes that he has been appointed as a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher. In verse 13 he says: ***"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."***

The ministry of a teacher is, as already mentioned, closely connected with the ministry of the apostles and prophets. A teacher does not have the task of a prophet, namely to shed light on the historical and prophetic part of the Plan of Salvation, rather, it is given to him to teach and explain to the congregation the details God revealed through the prophetic ministry. A teacher perceives all aspects of biblical teaching that concern the congregation.

The ministry of an evangelist is the most familiar to us, even so the evangelist Philip from Acts 8 should serve as an example for us. An evangelist is a servant of God filled with the Holy Spirit, who dynamically proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and whose ministry is especially confirmed by miracles, signs, and healings.

Like the other four offices, the office of shepherd is not limited to a local church but extends to the entire congregation of the Lord. A shepherd bears the responsibility for the well-being of the congregation. A shepherd appointed by God knows what spiritual food the ***"Good Shepherd"*** has prepared for His sheep.

Appointment of the Elders

In the Church of the Lord, elders are not appointed by majority decision, but by the apostles or by those they identify as servants of God. In this regard, Paul and Barnabas are a good example for us. We read in Acts 14:23: ***"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."*** In Titus 1:5, Paul writes: ***"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:"***.

Among the elders are also the bishops, for they are, as most Bible translations state, congregational leaders. Thus, this word does not actually mean what it is commonly understood to mean today. A bishop is a leader [overseer] in a local church and belongs to the elders. Whoever thinks that the present-day concept of a bishop is correct should consider that there were several bishops in the congregation at Philippi. We read in Philippians 1:1: ***"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops (overseers) and deacons:"*** We see, therefore, that in a local congregation there were several leaders. These leaders [overseers] are the elders of the congregation. In 1 Timothy 3:1 we read: ***"... This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop (overseer), he desireth a good work."*** In verse 2, we find the virtues and capabilities required of an overseer. He must be blameless and rule his own house well. He must not be a new convert and must also have a good reputation among the unbelievers. He must be honourable, prudent, hospitable, and a capable teacher. Just as a teacher appointed by God is responsible for the entire congregation, so are the leaders for the local churches, and therefore must be able to present biblical teachings.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Paul writes: ***"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among***

yourselves." That is the right and necessary attitude for a local congregation. They cannot place their trust solely in the ministry or the person of an apostle, prophet, shepherd, teacher, and evangelist, but must have complete trust in the elders and leaders of the congregation. This is the only way to ensure peace and blessings in the congregation.

In 1 Timothy 5:17 it states the following: ***"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."*** This is a command of the Lord and must be observed so that the elders can perform their duties with joy. Only in this way can they serve as preachers and teachers with full commitment in the church. God has placed the elders under special protection, as He has Paul write in verse 19: ***"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."*** It happens time and again that those whom God uses and has placed as a blessing for the church are quickly spoken against. No one should accept anything negative about an elder unless they hear it from the mouths of three independent witnesses. It does not apply if three conspire together and bring a complaint. It must be three independent witnesses who did not coordinate beforehand. It would be best if we applied this rule to the entire congregation, so that all gossip would soon come to an end. I would like to propose that a complaint against a brother or sister can only be accepted in their presence. No one should engage in a conversation without giving the accused the immediate opportunity to speak and defend themselves.

In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul writes: ***"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."*** Then he encourages his coworker to exercise the gift he had received from God. From the context, it becomes clear that Timothy had received this gift through the laying on of hands by the elders. In verse 14 it says: ***"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery [council of elders]. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all."*** In conclusion, he gives the serious admonition with the words: ***"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them..."***

Paul placed great importance on his coworkers holding fast to the same teaching he had received from the Lord. The elders, after they were appointed by the apostles, through whom the church was established, they bear the responsibility before God to pass on unadulterated teaching. Their task and responsibility are greater than generally assumed. When Paul was on his journey, he called for the elders of the church to come to him. Acts 20:17 states: ***"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church."*** Paul does not invite apostles, prophets, and teachers to himself, but summons the elders of the church in Ephesus.

One should read the entire chapter to see in what manner he speaks to these elders. From verse 27 onwards, it is reported to us: ***"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 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."*** In verse 17, the brothers are addressed as elders, in verse 28 as overseers or as leaders of the congregation. It is absolutely necessary to recognize that the elders are not elected by the congregation through a majority vote, but are appointed as overseers by the Holy Spirit. The elders also have the task of praying for the sick within the congregation, whereas an evangelist like Philip in Samaria can pray for anyone who comes to the gatherings. In James 5:14 it says: ***"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."*** From this word we can deduce, as we have said before, that the believers in a congregation should not place their trust in a travelling evangelist, but rather in the elders who are always available in the local church to pray for the sick. It would be advisable for all children of God to carefully read, once again, every Bible passage that addresses this topic, under prayer, so that we can finally experience anew the long-awaited result in the church of the living God.

Hebrews 13:17 says: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account..."* Peter writes in 1 Peter 5 from verse 1: *"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: 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; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

Peter, as an apostle, considers himself jointly responsible for the local churches, together with the elders, for the individual churches make up the entire congregation. Whatever happens in the congregation of the living God, whether through prophets, apostles, shepherds, teachers, and evangelists, or through the elders and leaders of the churches, everything unfolds in a divine harmony with the Head, Jesus Christ, and in connection with one another.

I am aware that these topics have only been touched upon, but I would like to encourage everyone to delve deeper into them. Let us establish the following fact: The Church of Jesus Christ is not a human organization or faith that one could join as a member like a club. No, it is a divine institution — a living organism. Every member of the congregation is born again by the Spirit of God and filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus subject to the guidance of the Spirit. The true congregation of the Lord knows no imposters.

By His commission

Bro. Frank

