

William Dolbeer

The Benediction



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The Benediction

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The Benediction

By Rev. William H. Dolbeer, A.M., B.D.

With An Introduction by Prof. D. H.
Bauslin, D.D. Of Wittenberg Theological
Seminary, and President of the General
Synod, 1905-1907

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Dedication

To My Friend,
The Rev. A. H. Spangler, D. D.,
Of Yeagertown, Pa.,
Through Whose Suggestion The Writer Was Directed To The Study Of The Subject Of
Which These Pages Treat,
This Work Is Gratefully Inscribed.

Let all things be done decently and in order – 1 Corinthians 14:40

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

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Foreword

THE WRITER did not suppose he would ever become an author and write a book – even a very little one. But a door has been opened before him into an unoccupied field, and an overruling Providence has seemed to beckon to him to enter. Recently he was appointed to read before Conference a paper upon “The Benediction.” The study which the preparation of that paper required revealed the following facts:

First. The subject is important. The official act of pronouncing the benediction has in it a greater significance than is commonly supposed. Its importance is second to no other ministerial function.

Second. Upon examination it proves to be an interesting subject. It is one which ought to enlist the attention of both clergy and laity when once is acquired a true conception of the real meaning and purpose of the act.

Third. Information upon the subject is a pressing need of the day. The irregularities and improprieties so frequently seen in this part of the services of God’s house are sufficient evidence of the want of proper information. The minister who officiates in holy things should understand fully what he is doing when he blesses the congregation in the name of the Lord, and the congregation ought to have an intelligent understanding as to what is the significance of that blessing.

Fourth. There is little literature upon the subject, and what there is is not easily procured. It is confined to a few expositions, commentaries, brief articles in cyclopedias, and works on liturgies. It was a cause of surprise to find how little available material there is bearing upon the subject. This work seems to occupy a field all its own.

These facts are an ample apology for attempting such a work as is here offered. It is only because there are such good reasons that it is written. In this day of many books it would be an offense against good taste to enter the field of authorship without urgent reasons for so doing. This small volume might have been greatly enlarged by historical data, and by references to the many curiosities which have been evolved under the name

of benedictions, but this would add little of value to the discussion. A simple, plain, thoughtful presentation of what the Scriptures teach on the subject is attempted, and this can be done with some brevity.

Reader, if you have given but little time to the study of the benedictions used in divine service, be grateful that the perusal of these few pages will not draw heavily upon the moments which have become so precious in this strenuous age.

If you have given the subject but little thought, be lenient if you find this effort is altogether serious and thoughtful, requiring the study of some truths which may appear to be truths only after careful examination.

If you may have prejudices against anything which seems to tend towards stricter practices in worship, be charitable, and reserve judgment until the contents of this book are thoroughly examined and carefully weighed by the word of God, which is the rule in all faith and practice.

To the ministry and laity of the Lutheran Church in particular, and to the body of Christians in general, this work is offered, with the prayer that it may help all who read it to attain a fuller conception of “the exceeding riches of God’s grace towards us.”

THE AUTHOR.

Introduction

REGARD AND ESTEEM for the Christian character and attainments of a brother with whom he was associated years ago, when both were in the delightful days of student life, and both preparing for the work of the ministry, have prevailed with the writer in the request with which he has been honored, to prepare this introduction.

Because the real benedictions authorized in the Scriptures are few in number is no reason why participation in this function of Christian worship should be perverted from its real design or indulged in carelessly. Nowhere is it more fatally easy to fall into unwarranted license or unspiritual formalism. In no part of the services of the Lord's house are some pastors as much inclined to go beyond what has been written and indulge in extemporaneous, infelicitous, and undevout productions of their own, or in unauthorized additions to what is, in its unadorned and stately simplicity, always unimproved by human additions.

The benedictions are rich in devout feeling. They are something more than the expression of an earnest Christian wish for the welfare of the people. Even the ancient peace greeting among the Hebrews – as, for example, in Ruth 2:4 – when not observed as a mere polite ceremony, at last returned to something of its religious significance. Congregations assemble to hear the word of the Lord at the mouth of the accredited and qualified teacher of the Church, and to participate in what are designated, in liturgical language, as the sacrificial and sacramental acts of worship. The last word of that teacher, when the people disperse and depart, should certainly be a veritable word of the Lord, unmodified and unembellished by any human addition. In the ancient Church, by divine command, Aaron and his successors in the priestly office were to bless the people with a particular form of sound words. In the early Christian churches it soon became the custom to dismiss the congregation with some form of blessing, such as “The Lord be with you,” or “Depart in peace.” In our day the richer and

much more significant apostolic benediction (2 Cor. 13:14) is used also in dismissing the people from the sanctuary.

It should always be remembered that in all soundly Protestant usage the benediction is in no sense sacerdotal. Neither is the congregational prayer. It is, however, it should be said, both prayer and assurance. In addition to this, and what is of more significance, in the benediction as in the sermon and the absolution, the word of God is imparted. It is something more than the utterance of a pious wish, for in it grace is offered, although, as in the absolution, it cannot be received unto salvation without faith. But, notwithstanding the dignity, scripturalness, and importance of this part of divine worship, there is no part of it that is more likely to degenerate into an unmeaning form of extemporized platitudes. Tone, manner of utterance, and attitude often show that the benediction is employed merely as the customary method of closing what the writer has often heard denominated the “exercises.”

In this volume the author presents the result of his studies in this important part of worship, and I feel assured that many will be surprised at the induction he has made into the facts pertaining to the subject, and the interest with which he has invested them. He has made an important contribution to the liturgical riches of the Church, and that, so far as the writer knows, in a new field of investigation. If his interesting and scholarly work herein presented shall serve to correct some abuses in this part of worship, he shall have accomplished a much-needed work, in addition to showing the dignity, scripturalness, and sufficiency of the benediction which in its threefold form foreshadows the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

DAVID H. BAUSLIN.

Hamma Divinity School, Springfield, Ohio, Festival of the Reformation, 1907.

1. Definition

IT SEEMS PROPER to anticipate the discussion of “The Benediction” by a definition. In order to do this, however, one is confronted with the difficulty that facts yet to be proven in the pages following must be drawn upon to furnish the basis for defining the act. All the leading dictionaries have been examined, with the result that not one furnishes a definition which agrees with the wording and explanations of the Scriptures themselves. A number of encyclopedias and other works have been examined, and the encyclopedias, with one exception, furnish no satisfactory explanations of the subject. Some leading encyclopedias scarcely mention it, though they treat amply the less important one of salutations. The one exception is the “Lutheran Cyclopedia,” which, in the article on Worship, in the few references made to the benediction, speaks of it in its true sense. There may be other works of this character which view the act in its proper light, but if so, we unfortunately failed to find them.

The main point on which the mistake is made by lexicographers is in that they define the benediction as an invocation or prayer. But it is not a prayer, either in form, meaning, or purpose. It is not that by which we are seeking some favor of God, but it is God’s answer to that which has been sought of Him in the different parts of worship. It is not something offered by us to Him, but it is something offered by Him to us. Even this does not give the full import of the act, for while it is the pronouncement of the fact that God imparts His blessing, at the same time the act is a means which the Lord has caused to be employed in the transmission and communication of that blessing. In the benediction, as pronounced by the priest or minister, God is conferring upon His true spiritual children the full measure of His blessing. He employs his regularly-appointed agents only in the act, but He has made the act a desideratum to the end in view. It is just as when a king or ruler sends by the hand of his officers, but over his own name, a declaration of amnesty and civil rights; he is the author of the declaration, the giver of the good, but his agents must of necessity promulgate the fact.

They pronounce, in his name and by his authority, that good which he offers; and from and through the pronouncement it becomes effective. So God, through the official act of His ministers, makes assurance of His blessings.

A benediction, in the general sense, is the act of blessing. Any act of calling down the blessing of heaven upon a fellow-being would in this sense be called a benediction. But it will be readily seen by what has been said above that the official act of blessing is something quite different from this. The benediction may be specifically defined as “the official pronouncement of the Lord’s name and blessing upon those who have appeared before Him in worship.” This definition implies that the act is a means by and through which that blessing is communicated and made effective.

That such is the character of the benediction as used in divine service it is the purpose of this work to show from the word of God.

2. Patriarchal Blessings

THE PRACTICE of pronouncing a blessing in the name of the Lord is very ancient. There are some eight or ten instances of this kind recorded in the book of Genesis. A brief reference to some of these will aid in preparing us for an examination of the specific benediction which was prescribed for the use of the Aaronic priesthood.

Whence arose this practice is not made clear. Whether the Lord had instituted such a religious rite, or whether it was copied from His example in declaring blessings upon His creatures, is not said. Certain it is that He pronounced His own blessing on a number of different occasions. Thus, for example, He blessed Adam and Eve. He blessed Noah and his sons when they had come forth from the ark. He also blessed Abraham. These blessings mainly dealt with the promise to multiply their descendants, and may have given rise to the practice among the patriarchs of pronouncing such blessings. However, any attempt to account for that practice must rest upon conjecture.

That the custom of declaring both blessings and cursings was common is indicated by several passages, such, for instance, as the one in which the Lord says to Abraham, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." Prominent among the instances of such blessings is that where Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God most high. This is specially significant as indicating that Melchizedek acted in an official capacity, by virtue of his priesthood. For this reason Abraham gave him tithes of all he had. The writer of Hebrews confirms this fact incidentally in his argument concerning the priesthood of Christ. The story of Isaac blessing Jacob is familiar to all. This blessing, obtained as it was by deception, was wisely repeated before Isaac sent Jacob away among his kinsmen. That such an act of blessing was regarded as conveying a good to the recipient and imparting to him peculiar privileges – in fact, as forming and controlling the destiny of one's life – seems to have been their belief. Thus we see Esau weeping and pleading, "Hast thou but one

blessing, my father? bless me, me also, O my father." Another prominent incident is that of Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph. Joseph was not pleased that his father placed his right hand upon the head of the younger son. The reason for his displeasure is found in the fact that both Jacob and Joseph saw in the act not only a religious rite, but also an official and priestly one by which the blessing was conveyed. It was prophetic. Jacob, according to patriarchal customs, was the high priest and seer over the tribe. They both regarded the act as carrying with it God's blessing. Joseph wanted the chief blessing for the elder son. Jacob, with prophetic vision, saw he was voicing the purpose of God when he pronounced the greater blessing over the younger son. It is quite apparent that they regarded the act as conferring a very real blessing from the Lord. We cannot fail to notice that the history of Israel shows that Jacob was right, not only in this case, but in the prophecies which he made when blessing his own sons. Let us also consider for a moment that the position of Jacob's hands seems to have been an important factor in conferring this blessing upon the sons of Joseph. It may be that the hands played a part in all those acts which are called blessings. It is probable the hand was either laid upon the head, or held towards or over the head in token of the act of laying it on the head. Thus Aaron lifted up his hand towards the people when he blessed them. This reference to patriarchal blessings may seem foreign to our subject; it will, however, be seen to have a bearing upon it.

Our better understanding of the subject may be still further secured by introducing another fact which may at first seem irrelevant. When Benjamin was presented before Joseph in Egypt, Joseph said to him, "God be gracious unto thee, my son." This is not spoken of as a blessing, yet in a sense it seems to be such. But there is something which appears to distinguish even these gracious words of Joseph from the blessings which have been considered. In it there appears to have been no laying on or lifting up of the hand, as if imparting a blessing. This was one of the common salutations of the day. No doubt at that time in the eastern countries it was used, as it is at the present time, by any pious person as a greeting or salutation. Anyone might properly speak to another just as Joseph did to Benjamin. Such salutations are referred to in numerous places in the Scriptures, and are not infrequently quoted. Thus in Ruth 3:10, "Blessed be thou of the Lord." In Ps. 129:8 it is said of failing to comply with this custom in a certain instance: "Neither do they which go by say, 'The blessing of the Lord be

upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord.” These salutations were often full of repetitions, and hence very long and tedious – entirely too lengthy for one on a mission of haste. Hence the prophet bade Gehazi to run to the house of the Shunammite, and to salute no one by the way, nor return the salutation of anyone. Jesus commanded the seventy to salute no one by the way. Their business required haste, or was too important to waste time in this way. These salutations were made at parting as well as upon meeting. Our parting words, “Goodbye,” are but the corrupted form of an old salutation, “God be with you.”

The difference between the salutation and the blessing is this: the former was an unofficial expression of good-will and wish; the latter was the official communication of God’s good-will and blessing. The one assumed to impart no blessing; the other, in act and word, assumed to not only pronounce a blessing in the name of the Lord, but to religiously impart that blessing. Anyone could give a salutation, none but those who occupied position or carried the weight of years could assume to bless, for “the less is blessed of the better.” We will do well to keep this difference between the salutation and the blessing in mind, for it is one of great importance in what follows.

3. The Aaronic Benediction

WHEN THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL had escaped from Egyptian bondage, a regular government, theocratic in form, was established. They became a nation, and with the taking on of national life, patriarchal institutions necessarily passed away. However, such changes are but slowly effected. We see among them relics of various patriarchal customs long afterward. Particularly was this the case at certain periods of disorganization under the Judges, when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The most radical change which was effected upon the assumption of national life was in their forms of worship. A regular and elaborate system of worship was adopted, and a stated priesthood was appointed to supersede the paternal form. Aaron and his sons were chosen for this priesthood, and were solemnly consecrated to the priestly office (Lev. 8.).

Concerning this setting apart of Aaron and his sons it is said in 1 Chron. 23:13: “And Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons forever, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister unto Him, and to bless in His name forever.” This defines plainly the general duties which belonged specifically to the office to which the Lord had called them. They at once assumed their priestly duties. When Aaron first officiated at the altar, after offering the prescribed sacrifices, but before he came down therefrom, “He lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them” (Lev 9:22). There appears to have been no previous arrangement for this act of blessing; at least, no stated command that he should so bless seems to have been made prior to this, his first priestly ministrations. It may be possible that he followed the patriarchal custom. It seems not improper to infer that he did so, and to regard the incident as throwing some light upon that custom.

However that may be, the Lord soon gave him and his sons very explicit directions concerning the act of blessing. It was now, by plain and unmistakable instructions, instituted as a solemn religious rite, and incorporated into the services of the tabernacle. This blessing is commonly

called the Aaronic benediction. The words of institution make very clear both the form and the significance of the act. They are found in Numbers 6:22-27.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying. On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;

"The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

“And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.”

The verse preceding and the one following the benediction are quoted because they give the most important information as to its purpose and character. There is about this benediction a simple majesty which calls forth our admiration. There is no finer passage anywhere, nor is there any which more fully expresses God's gracious purposes toward His chosen people, Israel. These are the Lord's own words to them. Though He has delegated to His priests their pronouncement, no human element enters into their composition. He has set His seal upon them as truly as upon the commandments which He traced with His own finger upon the tables of stone.

The first thought to be considered, then, is the authority upon which this blessing rests. What may have given rise to the patriarchal blessings we are unable to determine. Their origin and much as to their character will ever remain in obscurity. But as to the origin and character of this Aaronic benediction there is no obscurity. Its divine origin and authority are unquestioned. Both with respect to it as a priestly or ministerial act of blessing, and to its form when so used, it rests upon the command of the Lord. No gem in all the Scriptures has a firmer, stronger setting. The signet with which it is sealed in place is inscribed with "Thus saith the Lord." The fact of its authority is so clear that the question does not permit of argument. "The Lord spake unto Moses, . . . On this wise ye shall bless." Another question with reference to its authority, however, may not seem so

self-evident. It is the only benediction for the use of which there is a divine command. That is, there is no other passage of Scripture, either in the Old or New Testament, which the Lord has commanded should be used by His priests or ministers for the purpose of blessing the people. This statement may not be readily accepted, but a careful examination of every passage of Scripture used at all as a benediction reveals its truth. As it involves arguments which properly belong under other heads, it would not be wise to introduce them here, but the statement of the fact is properly made at this time. While the Aaronic benediction rests upon the clearest command for its authority, it is the only blessing which bears that distinction.

In the next place, a little examination makes it plain that it is not a prayer. Webster defines the benediction as “Specifically, the short prayer which closes public worship; as to give the benediction.” Webster is distinguished for the correctness and excellence of his definitions. He very seldom makes a mistake, but he certainly is mistaken in this instance. That such is the case need awaken no surprise, for a great many writers on religious and Biblical subjects make the same mistake. . Dr. Hitchcock, at one time president of Union Seminary, New York, in his “Analysis of the Bible,” classes all benedictions and salutations under the general head of prayers. Scott, the commentator, could not disabuse his mind of the idea that this benediction is a prayer. Many ministers so change the form of benedictions as to convert them into prayers. Now, we do not give a prayer; we offer or make it. We do not offer or make the benediction, we give it. The priest or minister is not praying for the divine blessing, but he is declaring or announcing it. He is the Lord’s agent, by whose mouth the communication of the blessing is announced. Yes, the act signifies more than this even. The minister, in the act of blessing, is the official agent whom the Lord uses to convey His blessing to those for whom it is intended. It is not a man’s blessing, but the Lord’s, yet He makes those men who minister before Him the stewards of His benefits, and gives them authority to dispense and convey those good things. But this will appear more fully later. It was introduced here to show how very different is this act from that of prayer. It is more than a prayer. It is not our approach to God, but His response to our approach to Him. It is not an address or petition from the congregation, through the priest, to God; but it is a proclamation from God, through the priest,officially to the congregation. It is not in any sense our word to Him, but in every sense it is His word to us.

Since it is not a prayer, what is it? it is the lord's response to worship. it is his assurance of answer to the prayers and supplications which his people have made, his acknowledgment of the offerings which they have brought. with this response and acknowledgment he bestows a blessing. the lord is so solicitous that his people shall realize his blessing that he does not leave the transmission of it alone to an unseen spiritual communication of blessing, but with the underlying spiritual assurance there is given the spoken word, which is made a vehicle through and by which is conveyed these spiritual things. this spiritual good is the consummation of worship. It is the grand end towards which all worship tends. The benediction is the climax which the act of worship anticipates. Hence the benediction presupposes preceding acts of worship. Not so either the salutation or prayer. Some act of a sacred and religious character must precede the official declaration of blessing. There must be a coming before the Lord; the offering of some sacrifice upon His altar; the dedication of some gift to His service; the prayers and supplications of those who have approached Him. Then God answers with the benediction by the mouth of His chosen ministers, and assures each believer of His blessing, grace, and peace. A benediction, then, is wholly out of place in a purely secular meeting. A prayer might be in place, for we have need always to pray; but the primary conditions which the benediction presupposes are wanting in secular meetings. The benediction, therefore, is the Lord's response with His gracious blessing to the believer and worshiper, and the act is designed to be a means in the communication of that blessing.

It becomes necessary, then, to consider the magnitude of the blessing here contemplated. This can be ascertained only by an examination of the words of the benediction, and what the Lord Himself has said in explanation of the act.

It will be noticed that the benediction is composed of three parts, and each part has two members. The number three is claimed to have been a Hebrew form of emphasis. Some explain or account for the form on this ground, that is, that it was so written to give emphasis and expression to the words. The threefold repetition of the name Jehovah, and the reiteration of His blessing from different points of view, give great emphasis to the passage. Then each of the three parts has two members, so that there is a parallelism running through the whole, imparting to the benediction a still more pronounced character. Some fanciful interpretations have been given

to these facts by certain writers which it is not necessary to consider here. There is no occasion to indulge in any forced interpretation of the passage in order to reach correct views of its meaning, nor is it advantageous to read into it any mysterious difficulties. It doubtless is true that it has a hidden typical character to which reference will be made in due time, but it would be of no assistance here. On the other hand, though the threefold construction of the blessing does give emphasis to it, it will hardly do to say it was so formed for the sake of emphasis. Emphasis must have a reason or cause back of it. It does no good to emphasize an unimportant thought. Emphasis, out of place, is like accenting the wrong notes in a piece of music. We introduce strongly marked accent in some pieces; it would spoil others. We emphasize "Old Hundred" by making all the tones of one strong character, without accent on any. If we should sing or play many another grand piece of music in that way it would effectually destroy its beauty. The reason for this is found in the fact that there is a dignity, a greatness, a sublimity in "Old Hundred" and the Doxology we sing to it which demand that style of rendition, and no other style will be in harmony with the theme. The thoughts expressed by the benediction are three, each having its own peculiar character, and it takes the three to make the grand sum of God's blessing. Again, each part is divided into two members because one member does not and cannot be made to express the full meaning of the part. The threefold parts of this blessing make it emphatic only because the greatness of the theme and the threefold view of God's mercies demand a corresponding statement. The parallelism of members heightens the emphasis only because each member but partially expresses the full truth of the part; it takes the two members in each case to give complete expression to the thought of that part. Otherwise the passage would lose in strength. The point we desire to make is that the emphasis is in no way artificial, nor given for effect, but is entirely consistent with the thought expressed. So, to say that a threefold parallelism, such as is here found, is a Hebrew mode of emphasis, does not account for the fact that the passage has three parts, with the name Jehovah appearing in each. And the method of accounting for the six members, by saying we have three parts of two members each, making six in all, which, added to the name Jehovah, makes seven, and that three and seven are numbers regarded with special reverence by the Hebrews, is not a sufficient explanation of the matter. Doubtless, very beautiful and instructive lessons may be drawn from such an interpretation of the

passage, but we are not drawing lessons, we are dealing with facts. Let us go a little deeper into the matter, and examine the thought of the passage.

The first clause or part states the fact that God blesses and keeps His people. The former member of the clause sets forth the truth that the Lord plans their good, and He brings that good upon them in blessings and prosperity; the latter member teaches that He watches over them and keeps them from enemies, from evil, curses, and pestilences. The one is seen in His plans concerning them, and in the mighty deliverance He wrought for them when He brought them forth from Egypt;. the other is seen in the pillar of cloud and fire which attended their march. It kept them in the way; it kept them from their enemies. He supplies in the largest sense; He protects in the most effectual way. In other words, God exercises paternal care towards His people. This clause, then, includes all that concerns His benevolent designs towards them. His purpose to bring about their good. His plans by which that end is to be secured, and the continual paternal care and protection which He throws about them. This thought of God's paternal care appears repeatedly in the Old Testament. It is given fullest expression in His declaration of love in such passages as Jer. 31:3: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." And in Isa. 49:15, where He compares His love for His people to that of mothers for their children: "Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee." These and other passages show that this paternal attitude of God towards His people is not dependent upon their attitude towards Him.

The meaning of the second part or clause is quite different. It expresses the fact that God reveals Himself, and that this revelation is a purely gracious act on His part. The first member of the part says that He makes His face shine upon His people. With that revelation of Himself is given the knowledge of His truth, His will, and mercy. This is made clear by Ps. 67:i, 2: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." The making His face shine upon us is His revealing Himself. Thus He "spake to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex 33:11). And Moses, in his plea in Num. 14:14, said:

"They have heard that Thou art among this people, that Thou art seen face to face, and that Thy cloud standeth over them, and that Thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night."

Thus “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel” (Ps. 103:7). By the second member of this part He makes known the fact that this revelation of Himself is independent of any claim on their part, but is wholly dependent upon His favorable inclination toward them. It is an act of grace. His making Himself known unto them, His revelation of His name, glory, power, truth, and righteousness, all is because He is gracious; and He purposes that He will cause this grace to continue toward them. Like the first part, this clause speaks of things which are independent of the attitude of His people.

But the third part or clause of the benediction differs from the other two, in that it speaks of that which is not independent of the attitude of the Lord’s people toward Him. The Lord lifts up His countenance upon them and gives peace. That is, the Lord removes His anger from His people, and comes into a delightful friendly relationship with them, in which they find pleasure and peace towards Him. He comes down upon them, causes His truth to enter their hearts and reform their lives, so that He is delighted with them, and gives expression to His pleasure by lifting up His countenance upon them. The result is their peace. This clause, then, refers to the converting and comforting power of God through His truth. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.”

These three parts of which the benediction is formed cover the whole wide scope of God’s benefits. Though we can hardly look at it free from the bias of our Trinitarian views, yet it seems to us the foregoing explanation would naturally follow without the later development of the doctrine of the Trinity. These three different fields of the operation of God’s goodness towards man are referred to over and over again in the Old Testament. The Aaronic benediction, then, gives expression in a very few words to the full scope of God’s benevolent designs towards His people, and the means He has taken to secure the accomplishment of those designs. Such is the Aaronic benediction, and such are the blessings which the Lord intends shall be conveyed unto those whom He has chosen.

4. The Significance Given To The Act Of Blessing By The Lord's Words

THE PRECEDING CHAPTER, with the exception of the part which dealt with its divine origin and authority, considered the Aaronic benediction itself. In this chapter it is proposed to examine into the significance of the act of blessing which the Lord's own words of institution warrant us in attaching to it. He has certainly left no room for doubt as to the import of the act, nor as to His purposes in instituting the rite. While care should be taken not to claim for the act any unwarranted power or meaning, we must not fall short of an acceptance of the full significance which His words imply. Our zeal must not carry us too far, our faith must not stop short of the full measure which the Lord's promise assures us. Certainly no rite in either Old or New Testament is more clearly defined. We are surely justified in accepting fully all that the Lord so clearly promises in this connection, as we are in all other things.

In the first place, it appears that the use of this benediction was intended to be purely official. It was to be exclusively an official priestly prerogative. It was one of the special functions for the performance of which Aaron and his sons had been separated from all other men.

The statement in Deut. 10:8 may seem to imply that the Levites, other than of the family of Aaron, had the privilege of blessing; but a more careful examination of the passage shows that such was not the case. In Numbers 8., the duties of the Levites are fully described, and this was not one of them. It belonged to the Levites because it belonged to the family of Aaron, who were Levites. Thus the Levites are spoken of as bearing the ark and other sacred vessels of the tabernacle during the marches of the children of Israel, while in truth the sons of Kohath alone were permitted to do this. (Num. 3:31 and 4:15-20.) In like manner the act of blessing is

spoken of as belonging to the Levites, while only the priests who were Levites were permitted to perform this act. None could presume to act in their place in this capacity, or if anyone did assume such a role there must be some peculiar circumstances which conferred upon him special privileges. The assumption of priestly prerogatives proved a costly experiment to Korah and his fellow conspirators. Yet Korah was a Levite, but not a priest. His associates were Reubenites. This incident shows that the paternal customs did not yield to the new order without a determined struggle. The act of Korah was a contention for the priestly rights, which the heads of families enjoyed under the patriarchal order.

That the privilege of blessing the people in this way was delegated to Aaron and his sons alone is mentioned in Deut. 21:5 and 1 Chron. 23:13, already quoted. Yet there are several instances in which those who were not priests did perform this priestly function, and their act was seemingly approved on the part of the Lord. The prophet Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph at the presentation of Jesus. Both David and Solomon went to the altar and offered sacrifices, and then blessed the people. Whether they used the Aaronic form or not we are unable to say, but this much is certain, they assumed priestly prerogatives both in the offering of sacrifices and in blessing the people from the altar. There were special reasons why they assumed these duties. It was a great event in the history of Israel when David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. It meant the re-establishment of the full Levitical service, which had been greatly neglected. So David, as the Lord's anointed king and head over the nation, upon reorganizing the tabernacle worship, introduced the reform by offering sacrifices, and it is said, "He blessed the people in the name of the Lord" (2 Sam. 6:18). That was still a greater day when Solomon dedicated the temple. He, too, offered sacrifices, and then "Turned his face about and blessed all the congregation of Israel (and all the congregation stood)" (1 Kings 8:14). The blessing mentioned in verse 14 must not be confused with the ascription to God which follows in verse 15. The former was a blessing of the people, the latter the blessing or ascription of praise to God. The words of blessing are not given. The writer of the record seems to take it for granted that in both the case of David and this, all would understand what that blessing was. Hence we assume they used the Aaronic blessing, or something very similar. The fact that Solomon, after the prayer, again blessed the people, and that in that instance the blessing is given, rather

confirms our assumption. When he blessed in words of a different import the words are recorded. The grounds upon which they assumed to perform priestly functions may be several. First, they were kings under the theocratic government of God. They looked upon their office as a holy gift from the Lord, and in that official character they re-established the sacred rites of God's worship, and they did so with their own hands as God's ministers. They did not propose to continue to do so. It was not a contention for the privilege, as was the act of Korah. God accepted their acts as official. But, again, they were the patriarchs of the nation by virtue of their high office, and it might be said that for a time Israel reverted to the patriarchal customs of earlier times, just as had been done in many things in the times of the Judges. But still another reason may be assigned. These kings, acting under divine direction and inspiration, may have assumed this priestly role as a type of that greater King, who should spring from the line of David, and who, though not of the Aaronic priesthood, should offer the all-important sacrifice and confer the most perfect of all blessings. These are the exceptions, and they strengthen the rule, for they show how strict was that rule that none but the priests could perform ministrations at the altar and bless in the name of the Lord.

In the next place, while the priest alone could properly administer this blessing, it was not optional with him whether he bless or not. The discharge of this service was a duty devolving upon him. When the conditions were such as to call for the blessing, the priest could not, because of any personal matters, withhold it. The Lord said, "Ye shall bless the children of Israel." It was the privilege enjoyed by the congregation of worshipers to be blessed; it was their right; they could claim it. God had just as truly set them apart to be blessed as He had set the priests apart to administer His blessing. The priest was the appointed agent in the act. His people were the appointed beneficiaries named in the deed. He could not refuse to transmit the described benefits unless some sin and impenitence were plainly manifest among them; unless they, on their part, were not complying with the conditions. To withhold their rightful blessing would be a gross act of presumption. Under any but the most extraordinary circumstances their presence and part in the worship entitled them to receive what God had promised. This part of worship could not properly be omitted when one authorized to perform it was present. "Ye shall bless."

We also notice that the Lord prescribes the form to be used, and says, "On this wise ye shall bless." The words are dictated. The passage, like all upon which the Lord has set His seal, and in the composition of which the human element is entirely wanting, has a divine superiority. Its great excellence removes the necessity of substituting any other words. It has been said of the commandments that no word can be taken from them, nor anything added to them without marring their force and beauty. The same may be said of the benediction. It will be but injured by any change. We can only lessen it by taking something from it, we cannot add anything by enlarging it. It expresses all things which belong to God's blessing of man. It evidently was the purpose of God not to permit any priest, ministering at His altar, to change it, much less to substitute any fanciful benediction of his own preparation. He knew quite well the disposition of some, and that there would be those who would have the conceit to think they were able to prepare a form of blessing which was finer and better. To hold in restraint this inclination to remodel this benediction, the Lord was very positive when He commanded, "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them." So this benediction was to be neither enlarged, diminished, nor in any way modified by the priests of Israel.

The words, "On this wise," are not to be interpreted as we interpret the words, "After this manner pray ye," which Christ speaks concerning the Lord's Prayer, because the other words, "Saying unto them," so qualify them as to give them this meaning and force, "In these words ye shall bless." If the blessing should be regarded by any on account of the words, "On this wise," to be simply a model form, then if it is made a model or pattern, any or all benedictions should follow the one and only model given us by the Lord, and should give full expression to both His name and His blessing. Such a lesson is for us under the gospel, but the Aaronic benediction was in no sense a model or pattern for benedictions to be used in Jewish worship. It divided the honors with no other. These were the words which the Aaronic priests were to use when they blessed the people.

The language with which the Lord instituted and authorized the benediction teaches us another important lesson. This specially claims our careful consideration, for it is probably the most important thought of all. It is more largely instrumental in revealing the character, purpose, and force of the benediction than anything thus far considered. It is this: By the act of pronouncing the benediction the priest puts the name of the Lord upon the

people, and with the conferring of that name the Lord declares that He will bless them. The strange thing about it is, the Lord does not say, "I will put my name upon them," but that the priests, Aaron and his sons, shall do this. "And they shall put my name upon them; and I will bless them." The name here used, as already seen, is Jehovah. This is the name which the Lord revealed to Moses at the time He delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. We are reminded that the Lord at a later day wrought a far greater deliverance by the introduction of still another name. This name, Jehovah, embodies in its meaning the thought of essential being; and coming as it does from the Hebrew verb which means "to be", is regarded as designating God as the One Eternal Being in whom is life, and from whom all life, which is in the world, has been given. By putting this name upon His people. He is imparting His being. His spiritual life to them. In other words, God is giving life to His people in naming them by His name. The priest or minister is employed to perform this holy and very exalted act of naming the Lord's people by His name. This must not be understood as applying to religious life externally and superficially; it means the life itself, not the nominal profession of religion. Where that name rests and abides there is life. This includes all blessing, comprises all good. God names His people for Himself and makes His abode with them and in them. For this purpose He sanctifies them as He sanctified the temple for His name. The minister pronounces that name upon them, puts it on them, and God blesses them by working in them through the Spirit and the word His gracious salvation and sanctification. To the end of producing such a gracious life in those who believe the benediction is a means.

The benediction, then, carries with its pronouncement not only the assurance of blessing, but becomes also a means or medium of blessing. It is, like other portions of the word of God, a means of grace, but it has this in addition, that it is the seal put upon all other ministrations of the means of grace. As already stated, it is the climax in worship, not simply a part of it. It is the consummation for which the people have attended upon holy ministrations, namely, the Lord's gracious blessing. The trend of all true worship is towards that supreme moment when God puts His seal upon the worshiper as His servants put His name. His saving name, upon them. Concerning this act Calvin says: "Hence we gather that whatsoever the ministers of the Church do by God's command is ratified by Him with a real and solid result; since He declares nothing by His ministers which He

will not Himself fulfill and perform by the efficacy of His Spirit. But we must observe that He does not so transfer the office of blessing to His priests as to resign His rights to them; for after having entrusted this ministry to them. He claims the accomplishment of the thing for Himself alone.” His view, as here stated, is identical with the interpretation given above. The Lord’s explanation of the benediction gives it a most important place in worship, and assigns to the act of the one officiating a significance which, without such unquestioned authority, surely no man would claim belonged to it. But these words are unmistakable, and ascribe to the act a significance and power some may be slow to admit: “And they [the priests] shall put my name upon them [the worshiping people]; and I will bless them.” “Thus if the name of God is laid on Israel from above, so, too, Israel is therewith in this name raised high aloft.” – Lange. The following words of Jesus, in His prayer for His disciples, because of these truths, gain in significance:

“Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name” (John 17:11, 12).

Even so, may God keep all, whom He has given unto Christ, through His name unto life eternal. May the Holy Name so come upon all believers in gracious benedictions spoken by the mouth of His ministers.

Perhaps a comparison may make still clearer the nature and force of the act of blessing. Illustrations, while not proof, do assist us in understanding propositions. In the Lutheran Church we have a service which almost exactly illustrates the case in hand. It is the “Confession and Absolution,” which is the chief feature of the Preparatory service. After the pastor has given such instructions and exhortations as the occasion demands, the people then confess their sin, their penitence, and their faith, whereupon the pastor assures all who made this confession sincerely of the divine pardon of sin. He does so with authority, by virtue of his office as a minister of the word. He declares to them the fact that God’s pardoning grace extends to each one. The minister does not forgive sins, but God does; but the minister officially assures that He does. The Lutheran pastor does not say, “I absolve thee,” but he does say, “Upon this humble confession which you have made, as a minister of the Church of Christ, and by His authority, I declare

unto you who do repent and believe in Him, the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” In pronouncing the benediction the pastor stands in precisely the same relation to the worshiper, and his act is the same in character and force. On this point Rev. E. T. Horn, D. D., says:

“The benediction is not the mere utterance of a pious wish; it offers grace, though, like the absolution, it cannot be received unto salvation without faith.”

We are sure Christ’s words in Matthew 16:19, and John 20:23, give full authority for our views and practice as to absolution. The act of pronouncing the benediction has been much more clearly defined as to its form and purpose than that of absolution. But generally more thought has been given to the question of the minister’s relation to the worshiper in the act of absolution than in that of the benediction.

It will be seen, from the discussion so far, that the meaning and force of the benediction has been very generally overlooked; and as a consequence this important ministerial duty has frequently been indifferently and carelessly performed. When the minister comes from the altar, he must not forget that he now bears a message from the Lord to the waiting congregation. It is not a prayer; it is not man’s word; it is in no sense a subordinate act. It is the Lord’s own explicit word, and man is the entrusted messenger. It is the end sought in worship, namely, the Lord’s salvation and blessing. For the purpose of conveying, by appointed means, this blessing to His children, has God chosen and set apart His priests, His ministers; and in no part of the services of the sanctuary does this fact of their mission appear more evident than when with uplifted hand they bless in the name of the Lord.

The facts thus far presented establish the correctness of the definition given, and the benediction, specifically, is the official pronouncing of the Lord’s name and blessing upon His children; or is that declaration of blessing in which the minister acts as the ambassador of God.

5. The Epistolary Salutations

BEFORE WE PROCEED to examine the “Apostolic Benediction,” another subject claims our attention. This seems necessary that we may properly distinguish between various sentences which are mistakenly used as benedictions and those which may be properly so used. It may seem to some a matter of little importance, but if the lessons taught by Numbers 6:22-27 are duly considered, it is certainly far from unimportant. Since there is at least one most comprehensive benediction, of unquestioned authority, and hedged about with the most gracious promises, it certainly is a loss to the spiritual uplift of the worshiper when other words, which express less and which were never intended as a benediction, are substituted.

It seems to us evident that if another passage has not been as clearly authorized as a benediction, then it should not be used as such, unless it as fully declares the name and grace of God as does the Aaronic blessing. This, then, is the question to be decided, namely, is there anything which can properly be substituted for the Aaronic benediction? If so, what is it, and why may it be so used? One listening to the various so-called benedictions might be led to suppose there are many sentences, both in the Bible and out of it, which may be so used. Here is a matter which is to be investigated candidly, laying aside, if possible, any preconceived notions we may have had. It must be remembered that as a rule very little thought has been given to this whole question. The writer realizes that in what is to follow may be much that is at variance with views generally held, and it is to him a delicate position in which to be placed. But if he can only be the means, under God, of setting his brethren in the ministry to thinking upon this important subject he will be satisfied. He will trust to time to sustain his position, for he has confidence that it is Biblical.

Each epistle of Paul begins with the greeting or salutation, “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In three cases only does he vary from this form. This is sometimes used as a

benediction, but not properly so, as will appear later. Likewise each of his epistles closes with a salutation, but these are not uniform, as are those at the beginning of his letters. Some of the other writers close their epistles in like manner.

In closing the second epistle to the Thessalonians Paul clearly points out the character of these sentences, which are now so frequently used as benedictions. He writes: "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle; so I write. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." A number of Paul's epistles were written by the aid of an amanuensis. But he puts the seal upon every one by writing with his own hand this or some similar salutation.

Now, salutations were as familiar to Paul as our salutations, "How do you do?" "Farewell," or "Good-bye" are to us. He made his salutations purely Christian in character. Aside from that, most of them partook of the form of some of the common salutations of that day. Even at the present time, in Palestine and other eastern countries, the same forms are used. Paul elsewhere speaks of the blessing or benediction. Thus in 1 Cor. 14:16, where he is reproving some for making too free a use of the ability to speak in an unknown tongue, "Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say the amen at thy giving of thanks?" He uses a different word here, and the one by which the Aaronic benediction is always designated. As this work is written in the hope that it may be of interest to intelligent laymen as well as to ministers, the writer has thought proper not to burden its pages with frequent references to the languages in which the Scriptures were originally written. But as this is such an important thought, and a pivotal point in the discussion, for this once a few such references may be pardoned. Even to the eye of one unfamiliar with those languages the difference between the words will convey a meaning. The word which Paul uses in speaking of the salutation is *ασπασμος*; (*aspasmos*). This is derived from the verb *ασφαζομαι* (*aspadzomai*), which means *to embrace, to greet, to salute*. This word is found in Mark 12:38, Luke 1:29, 10:4, and other places where salutations or greetings are mentioned. It will be readily seen that the Latin word *pax* and our word *peace* bear a close relation to this Greek word. The corresponding Hebrew word is *shalom* (*shalem* or *salem*), and in its different forms is found in those passages where our English translation uses the words *salute* or *peace*. Thus David saluted his brethren (1 Sam.

17:22). This word Salem (peace) is seen in Scripture proper names, as Jerusalem. It is said that one traveling in the east today is addressed with this same word as a salutation. The root of our word *salutation* it will be noticed, is the same as that of this Hebrew word. On the other hand, the word for blessing in I Cor. 14:16 is εθλογνσνσ (eulogisas), from εθλογεσ (eulogeo), from which we derive our word eulogy. It is used in different forms, as the case required, in Luke 2:34, 24:50, Mark 10:16, and other passages. It is the word used in the Septuagint to express the meaning of the word “bless” in the Aaronic benediction. The word in the Hebrew is (barak). Primarily, it means *to kneel, then to bless*. We are reminded by this that many blessings and favors are received kneeling, and thus the word, no doubt, came to mean to bless. Every knight who received that stroke of the sword by which he was given knighthood reminds us that the thought expressed by this word has had a practical application in the affairs of men in more modern times. Still the word does not necessarily indicate the attitude of the one being blessed. The people stood when Solomon blessed them. So we see that the blessing spoken of in the Aaronic benediction corresponds with that mentioned by Paul in I Cor. 14:16, and it quite plainly appears that Paul regarded the salutation as something distinct from the blessing or benediction.

Some writers class all these salutations under the head of benedictions. Dr. Hitchcock does so, and places all, as already said, under the general head of prayers. All but one of them lack one or more of the distinguishing characteristics of the Aaronic benediction, and inasmuch as Paul classes them with salutations, we will do well to leave them where he puts them, unless we have some paramount reason for doing otherwise. There must be found good and satisfactory reasons if we use any of them as a blessing of the people.

Now someone will ask, “But are not these salutations really benedictions?” Certainly, just as are all salutations; but only in the general, not in the specific sense. That is, they are benedictional salutations, not priestly or ministerial blessings. They may be used unofficially; not so the Aaronic benediction. Anyone might say to his friend, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you,” and say it properly; but only the one who has been set apart to officiate in holy things can, with right, hold his hand over another’s head and say, “The Lord bless thee and keep thee,” etc. But why is this difference? Because the Lord has made the latter His own

declaration by the mouth of His ministers, and He has delegated to His ministers alone the right to so pronounce these words. Their use is official. They are to be spoken not only by authority, but with authority. So we must conclude that there is a vast difference between a simple salutation and an official blessing.

Already, while Jesus was upon earth with His disciples, they had given their salutations a special significance, and were inclined to salute only their brethren. This He reproves by saying, "And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?" This plainly indicates that salutations are permissible under all circumstances. On the other hand, Jesus put His hands on little children and blessed them; and when about to ascend. He "led His disciples out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them." All of these references confirm the distinction made between the salutation and the benediction.

The epistles which do not close with a salutation are James, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, and Jude. The last, however, closes with a grand ascription to God, neither salutation nor benediction. The salutation, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," is used in Romans, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians and Revelation. We find practically the same in I Corinthians and I Thessalonians, only the word "all" being omitted. In Galatians, Ephesians, Philemon, and I Peter the name of Jesus Christ is used in the salutation. But in Colossians, I Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and 3 John, the Divine name is not used, but only the ordinary forms of salutation in common use. The divine name is indispensable in the benediction, because the act of pronouncing it is the putting of that name upon God's people; so those salutations which do not contain the name of Christ need not be considered.

The other salutations, as, for instance, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," as we have seen, are designated salutations by Paul, who was perfectly familiar with the Aaronic benediction and its use. Now, if Paul had regarded them as benedictions he would most certainly have called them blessings. We ought, then, to hesitate before using them as benedictions. It is true they contain grand words, and express large benevolence and good-will, but before we can properly substitute them for the Old Testament benediction there must be clear and undisputed evidence that we have the right to do so. They should, at least, contain the same full, clear expression of God's name, and they should give the same wide and

comprehensive statement as to God's blessing, grace, and peace. If they do not do this, they fall below that benediction, and in so far, are not qualified to supersede it. This is just what they do not do. Neither do the salutations with which Paul opens his epistles.

While it is true that Jesus has been given a name above every name, and it is also true that His grace is all-important, yet He says, "The Father is greater than I." He taught us to pray to the Father, saying, "Hallowed be Thy name." In every way He exalts the Father's name. He commits all His disciples to that name, through which they are kept unto eternal life. To omit the Father's name from a benediction in which His blessing is officially declared finds no support in the Scriptures. It is the name of God, in all its fullness, with all His promised good, which is put upon His people. This is where the salutations fail to meet the purpose of the Aaronic benediction.

6. The Pauline Or Apostolic Benediction

THERE IS, HOWEVER, one of the salutations of Paul, if we may call it a salutation, which stands out clear and distinct from those which were considered in the preceding chapter. This, in all respects, meets the requirements indicated by the standard which God Himself has established. It holds out to us the Father and His love, the Lord' Jesus Christ and His grace, and the Holy Ghost and His blessed communion. In it is the same completeness of the holy name and the same comprehensive offer of God's manifold gifts.

This is known as the Pauline or Apostolic Benediction. It is sometimes called the "Trinal Apostolic Benediction," though it is hardly necessary to so designate it, for by the pattern revealed unto us in Num. 6:24-26, all true official benedictions must, of necessity, be trinal in form. If God was particular about every part of the tabernacle, that all be made as prescribed, how careful ought we to be, then, to "see that we make all things after the pattern which was showed" in revelation!

This apostolic benediction is found in 2 Cor. 13:14, and is as follows:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."

There is no Amen in the leading manuscripts, which fact will be considered in its proper place. Our present duty is to examine this passage with the view of ascertaining if it may be regarded and used as a benediction on an equality with the Aaronic.

It has been used in this way by nearly the whole body of Christians. The best information at hand leads us to think it has been so used throughout the history of the Christian Church. There is great scarcity of historical data. Some works in which one expects to find information scarcely mention the

subject at all. While a full history of the use of benedictions might be interesting and profitable, its bearing upon our present discussion would be quite remote. The rituals and liturgies of some of the denominations contain only the Aaronic and apostolic benedictions, though in practice there is much carelessness in pronouncing the latter, and quite frequently something quite different is given.

The apostolic benediction, notwithstanding these irregularities, occupies much the same place in Christian worship that the older one did in Jewish worship. While use alone would not establish its claim to that position, yet the fact of its general use cannot be ignored. One naturally asks. What distinguishes it from the salutations already considered, and why is it given the preference over them? Are there excellent reasons for using it, as a benediction? Are we warranted in giving it a place beside and on an equality with the Aaronic benediction? These questions are worthy of careful discussion, and the importance of the matter makes a correct answer most desirable.

On examination we shall find they have more in common than at first appears. As to their thought, there is a remarkable similarity. Only in one point is there a difficulty which becomes an obstacle to the ready acceptance of this passage as a benediction, but even this, though serious, is not insurmountable. It will be well to meet this difficulty at once, though in doing so it may be necessary to anticipate some facts which will more plainly appear when the two benedictions are compared.

The point of difficulty which we meet in our acceptance of these words of Paul as a benediction, is that there is no direct command that it be used in this way. We have seen that the Aaronic benediction rests on unquestioned authority. It has back of it the divine command. The Lord had said, "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel." But Paul seems to class 2 Cor. 13:14, with his other salutations. It unquestionably was written as such. It was his token or seal of the genuineness of his second epistle to the Christians at Corinth, written, as in the case of each epistle, by his own hand. We can give no other interpretation to 2 Thess. 3:17. The fact that Second Corinthians was probably written several years, later than Second Thessalonians does not seem to alter the case. This does not call in question the inspiration of the passage, but simply notes that there is wanting any command authorizing its use as an official blessing.

Rev. Edward T. Horn, D. D., says,

“The Thanksgiving Collect probably was composed by Luther, and he prescribed the Old Testament benediction as the only one commanded by God.”

Notwithstanding this seeming want of authority, the apostolic benediction appears to be a true blessing. The grounds for its use must rest upon its internal character. We must seek for authority in the passage itself. Though Paul may have written it as a salutation, it has all the characteristics of the Old Testament blessing. Here is the complete divine name as revealed in the New Testament. Here are all the truths, as will be later shown, which are set forth by the Lord in ^prescribing the benediction for priestly use. Here are special features adapting it for a like use in Christian worship. The language, to all intents and purposes, expresses the meaning of the older benediction, the mode of expression fully comports with the revelation of grace. These reasons do not apply to the other salutations. Each one of them lacks not only a command, but also at least one, generally more than one, of the specific features which characterize the Aaronic blessing. The passage under consideration lacks only the presence of an authoritative command.

Under the guidance of God the Church at large has been led to appropriate it for this purpose. The Aaronic benediction was the official declaration of God’s gracious response to the worshiper who had appeared before Him. That worship was replete with types and symbols. These all find their fulfillment in Christ and His worship. In so far the law was a shadow of things to come. But now “The priesthood being changed, there is of necessity a change also in the law,” and we find many consequent changes in forms and practices of worship, and that without special commandment. The great criteria seemed to be found in the sacred fitness of the newer things. Thus, we worship on the first day of the week, and without the support of a commandment. The Christian Church has adopted the Lord’s Day as its Sabbath and day of worship for ample reasons. It accepts the commandment to keep the Sabbath as applying to this our Sabbath. In the same way has the apostolic benediction ample grounds for its use. After all, the question rests with its fitness. If this trinal salutation will be found, by every test which we can apply, to meet the ends of the blessing given under the law, then we have sure grounds for its use. It will be found to bear the test with credit. It will be found also that the very examination, by which its fitness will be proven, will also show unquestionably the insufficiency of the other salutations.

Before passing on, it may be proper to state that by these thoughts it is not intended to disparage the use of the Aaronic benediction. It is altogether suitable for use in Christian worship, and we think should be used more frequently than is generally the case. Luther says, "There is no book in the Bible in which both law and gospel are not found. God has always placed side by side both law and promise." The Aaronic benediction, judged by this, is purely gospel, for it not only bears the sweet incense of the most precious promises, but is the very declaration of the actual grace of God and a means of that grace. The act is, in its whole character and spirit, plainly a dispensing of gospel truth, and is fully in accord with any and all Christian services.

Our liturgiologists were wise in using only these two benedictions. They are too few to cause confusion; they are ample for all occasions.

7. The Aaronic And Apostolic Benedictions Compared

FROM THE PRECEDING CHAPTER it appears that a careful comparison of the Aaronic and apostolic benedictions will be necessary. We must find on what grounds the latter is admissible as a benediction if we are to continue to so use it. Not only must all points of similarity be considered, but also all points of difference. These must be weighed as impartially as possible.

Trinal in Form

Both are trinal in form. In the Aaronic benediction there are three parts, and the name Jehovah is used in each. In pronouncing it, some writers say, the high priest, at least on some occasions, repeated the whole three times, and each time with a different accent on the divine name. A Hebrew, however, informs the author that this is a mistake; that the high priest repeated the blessing but once, and with the same intonation of the divine name. The Jews regarded this repetition of the holy name as containing some deep mystery. There were a great many mysteries in connection with the temple service which we Christians are sure are made plain by the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. We attribute to the threefold mention of the name a decidedly Trinitarian meaning.

“It is not to be ignored, that the number three may be regarded as an Old Testament form of emphasis, and the six members as a threefold parallelism of members. But just as little should one ignore that the three economies of divine revelation are very plainly reflected in this benediction. And thus it forms one of the most glorious of the typical germs of the New Testament revelation in the Old Testament.” – Lange.

It is not in the province of this work to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity. But this is written for those who accept that doctrine.

To us God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – Triune. The apostolic benediction makes mention of these three persons, and specifies the particular position of each in the plan of salvation. Thus the divine name is used in each three times. In this respect there is a complete correspondence. We believe this correspondence is not accidental.

We are sure that the doctrine of the Trinity, which appears so vividly in the apostolic benediction, explains, in a measure, the mystery which was regarded as contained in the other one. We do not doubt that the triple use of the name Jehovah in Num. 6:24-26 was an intimation of these three persons in the Godhead, and that the apostolic benediction gives clear expression to that which was there indistinctly foreshadowed.

Unity of Content

When we compare the contents of the two we are again impressed with their unity. There is unity of thought, but not uniformity of expression. They differ both in wording and in the order of clauses. To compare them properly we must exchange the first and second clauses of the apostolic benediction, for the second clause of this corresponds with the first of the Aaronic. We need not think this strange, for under the law the most prominent thought was the blessing and care of God as the Father over all; under the gospel the most pronounced thought is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the grace of God as revealed in Christ. Each Testament gives the first place to that which is most prominent in its teaching.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The love of God be with you all.

In the Old Testament the Lord kept before the mind of His people the fact of His blessing and care. He is the Father, from whom proceeds all providential oversight. In the New is emphasized not only this providence, but the cause. The one presents the fact, the other both the fact and why it became a fact – namely, love. God, even in the law and the prophets, was

making known the truth that His blessing and keeping were due to His love. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). The strength of His love for Israel surpassed that of a mother for her child. He could not "forget those whom He had graven on His hand (Isa. 49:15, 16). But this fuller expression of His love was made long afterwards. The first great fact to be impressed upon Israel was that their blessing and keeping were from Him.

But when Christ came and explained these deep mysteries of God it became most apparent that all of His beneficent acts flow from His great love. All that God has ever done for His people has been the outgrowth of His infinite affection. Thus John says, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." Christ Jesus, in that grand prayer in John 17, in which He prays that the disciples may be kept by the Father's name, speaks these words: "And that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me." He associates the thought of their being kept by the Father's name with that of the love of the Father for them. So, while the older benediction speaks of blessing and keeping, the later one speaks of that in God which causes Him to bless and keep. The one reveals God's purposes towards His people, the other brings into full view that which called those purposes into being, and which prompts their execution.

The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

The former speaks of the fact that God reveals Himself to men, and of His graciousness; the latter speaks of the means by which has been manifested His fullest revelation and grace. That which in the older dispensation was told, in the later is seen. The one is law, the other is grace and truth. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Christ brings within the range of our vision Him whom we had not otherwise seen and known. This thought is made clear in His reply to Thomas, "If ye had known me, ye

should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him.”

Again He says, “He that seeth me seeth Him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” In Hebrews we are told that Jesus is the brightness of the glory and the express image of the person of the Father. While we may not look upon the Father’s face, yet Christ Jesus, by His grace, causes the glory of that face to shine upon us. This is what Paul means when he says, in 2 Cor. 4:6, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” So the fact that God reveals Himself and manifests His grace is made known in the one. The means of that revelation and nature of that grace are comprehended in the other.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all.

The Holy Ghost, taking the things which belong to Christ, shows them unto His followers. He it is who illumines the truths of God, as revealed by Christ; so we see “the face of God is turned on us in love.” The fact that God looks upon us, that He turns His benign countenance upon us and gives peace is asserted in the one benediction; how He brings His favor to bear upon us and gives peace is given in the other.

It is in connection with the promise of the Holy Ghost, who should refresh the minds of the disciples and comfort them, that Christ said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” The world gives peace in formal salutations, but Christ gives peace by the Holy Spirit, through the word. Such a blessing is pronounced in the benediction. A common salutation was, “Peace be with you.” It was often, perhaps generally, repeated as a mere form, no doubt with no more thought than when we say “Good-bye” to some friends whom we have met. Yes, it was often repeated where no goodwill existed. That was the peace the world gave. It meant very little. Christ said, “My peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” He sets the peace which He

imparts through the Holy Ghost, and which is proclaimed in the benediction, over against the peace of the salutation. Well He may, for He sends this Holy Comforter to be with and in His disciples, and by and through Him we have fellowship, communion with God. "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." The benediction under the gospel is a real gift of peace. We see that the Lord has not turned His face away from us, but His countenance is lifted up upon us, and it is the favorable countenance of a Friend. The indwelling of the Holy Ghost, whereby we are brought into the full favor of God, into the full enjoyment of this exalted fellowship, is called "The communion of the Holy Ghost." So while the Aaronic benediction declares the fact of God's favor and peace, the apostolic reminds us that His favor and peace are found in the communion of the Holy Ghost.

Thus we see that the two benedictions agree in thought, with this difference, that the older one declares the fact of God's blessing, grace, and peace; the later one, with this fact in plain view, declares the cause of the fact and the means through which blessing, grace, and peace are realized by God's children. It is apparent that the apostolic benediction does not lose by this comparison. It really carries the view of the goodness of God, as seen in the benediction, forward a step. This is what we would expect, as in harmony with the advance made from the law to the gospel. In fact, it seems to be a fitting adaptation of the benediction to the needs of Christian worship. This largely accounts for its general adoption.

Simplicity.

As to simplicity of language, the apostolic benediction compares favorably with the older one. Notwithstanding the fact that in it is given as comprehensive a view of the great kindness of God, it has greater brevity, equal simplicity of expression, and a dignity as exalted. No man could amend or improve the Aaronic benediction; but the Lord, by His inspired writer, has given us a counterpart which surpasses it in simplicity and brevity, just as the gospel in these respects surpasses the law. Paul does not say, "And now may the grace of God the Son," but simply, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." He does not say, "And the unsearchable love of God the Father," but "And the love of God." He does not say, "And the

communion and fellowship of God the Holy Ghost,” but “And the communion of the Holy Ghost.” Nor does he say, “Be and abide with you all, now and forevermore, world without end,” but simply, “Be with you all.” To reduce it in any way would place it in the list with other salutations; to increase it in any way makes it redundant, and consequently weakens it.

This comparison, we think, fully substantiates the claim made as to the fitness of the apostolic benediction for the position it occupies. It may properly be placed beside the Aaronic blessing, and be accorded the same high authority. For, although there is no direct command, there are all the chief characteristics of the authorized blessing. The two harmonize in their simplicity, in their triple form, in their unity of thought, and in their announcement of the divine name. Both are divine blessings. Both make full declaration of the name and blessings of the Lord God. Both express comprehensively, as is nowhere else done in so few words, the fullness, the completeness, the richness of God’s grace, mercy, and peace.

The one, while not a pattern for other benedictions in Hebrew worship, gives us the pattern for the newer gospel form, the other conforms to the pattern; the one reveals and expresses God’s purposes towards His children, the other illuminates those purposes; the one gives us the facts, the other includes the demonstration of the facts; the one is the grace of God declared from the midst of law and ceremonial worship, the other is the law of God declared as to His grace in redemption, loving care, and salvation. They are the chapters upon the two pillars Jachin and Boaz in the porch of the Temple: the one, Jachin, is the promise of coming establishment; the other, Boaz, is its confirmation in strength.

8. The Apostolic Benediction And Epistolary Salutations Compared

SALUTATIONS OCCUPY an important place in man's relation to his fellows. The fact that they are found among all nations indicate their utility. The benedictions occupy an important place in worship. The salutation and the benediction are related to each other. Parts of the Aaronic benediction clearly correspond with certain salutations. Thus, "The Lord bless thee," is given as a salutation in Ruth 2:4. Joseph said to Benjamin, "God be gracious unto thee." Some other parts of this benediction are also very similar to salutations. The apostolic benediction may also be shown to bear a close relation to the salutation.

It is this benediction we now propose to compare with the epistolary salutations, that it may be more fully shown that even these, which express so much of good-will and blessing, do not comply with the standard set by the Aaronic benediction, nor gain the end secured by the apostolic. This benediction includes all things as to God's name, grace, love, and spiritual life. The salutations include these things only partially. Two very important parts of the benediction express what is not in any of the salutations. There are no salutations which express the meaning of the words,

"The love of God," or "The communion of the Holy Ghost."

God is very solicitous for the salvation of man. To this end He has made and revealed a most gracious plan. In the development and working out of this plan, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the three persons of the Godhead, are all actively engaged. At no point in the plan does one work independently of the other, for it is one God who is thus revealed as three persons. Yet, in the plan each has His own special sphere of operation in which He appears as the chief agent.

Thus, the Father has planned and appointed the blessing of salvation and eternal happiness for man. The Son and Holy Spirit appear in this along with the Father, in that they also have the same design concerning man. But it appears as the special field of activity of the Father that He ordains and provides for the reclaim and happiness of the world.

Because this benevolent design is the immediate outgrowth of His commiseration and love, it is spoken of in the benediction as the “love of God.” This is not said to the exclusion of that love which is borne toward man by the Son and the Holy Ghost. The love of Christ constantly appears in His life and work, and the love of the Spirit is continually manifested by His interest in men’s souls. But the words, “the love of God,” express particularly the full scope of all the Father’s providence, kindness, and beneficent designs which He bestows upon His people. So, this part of the benediction is intended to cover one of the definite parts of the divine plan of salvation. This paternal feature in the divine economy is by all regarded as of highest significance and importance. This divine supervision, this fatherly care and keeping of His people, this supreme interest in man’s eternal welfare, which shows itself in all provisions made for his salvation, is but the outflowing of that love which He is. As John says, “God is love.” This supreme fact of God’s paternal attitude towards His people is not expressed in any simple sentence salutation given in the New Testament. The nearest approach to it is in 2 Cor. 13:11, “And the God of love and peace shall be with you.” This, however, is made as a promise, and not as a salutation. If there were such salutations, they could only be construed by inference as covering the ground of God’s full measure of blessing. One might infer that because God’s love is the source of all man’s mercies and blessings, that the salutation, “The love of God be with you,” would cover the whole ground. But the absence of such a salutation does away with the necessity of drawing any inference at all. There is no sentence in the New Testament in the form of salutation or benediction which expresses what is meant when we say, “The love of God be with you,” other than this in the apostolic benediction. So, in this respect, there is no one of the salutations which is sufficiently comprehensive.

The special work of the Lord Jesus Christ was to provide for our redemption. He has purchased by His own blood, shed upon the cross, the salvation appointed by the Father. All things necessary for the redeeming of the soul, and all things which iDelong to that redemption in any way He has

secured by His humiliation, suffering, and death. Now, all of God's goodness towards us is an act of grace, or what, in other words, we would term unmerited favor; and as this grace is more marvelously displayed in Christ's work of redemption, the sacred writers spoke of His work specifically as one of grace. This is not done to the exclusion of the grace of the Father and Holy Spirit, but rather with the idea that the chief manifestation of the grace of God is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is brought to man through the Son. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Thus Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:4, "I thank my God always in your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." The benediction and a number of the salutations agree in the words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." By these words, no doubt, reference is made to that special feature of the plan of salvation which belongs to the mediatorial work of Christ. But, as seen already, this is not all of God's wonderful plan for saving men.

Let us, for the sake of comparison, combine these two parts, "The love of God" and "The grace of Christ," and we still have not covered the ground of the riches of God's gifts to men, nor have we fully given expression to His revealed name. If we had, then we would be justified in using as benedictions some of the salutations with which certain epistles open. The larger number of Paul's epistles have, with slight variations, this greeting,

"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

And several have this greeting, "Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." This is often changed to read, "Grace, mercy, and peace, from God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be with you all," and in this form is used as a benediction, but there is no such sentence in the word of God. John, in his second epistle, greets those to whom it is written with these words, "Grace, mercy, and peace be with you, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." The Revised Version, however, construes this in a way to place it without the bounds of salutations. Now, if the scope of God's goodness and blessing was fully covered by the work of the Father and the Son, these salutations might be appropriately used, but this, however, is not the case.

There is one other field of operation in the great plan, and there is one other name in the Trinity. The apostolic benediction does not fully conform to the Aaronic until this precious name is spoken, and the work of Him who bears it is designated. In no salutation is it said, "The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This is the point which radically separates this from all the salutations, and marks it as a benediction. The office of the Holy Ghost is to offer and apply, through the word and the sacraments, the blessing of the Father and the redeeming grace of the Son. He takes the things which belong to Christ and shows them unto Christ's followers. He brings the believer into spiritual touch with the Father and the Son. He abides with believers and ministers to their comfort and joy. He is ever with God's people. As Jesus says, "He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." This abiding presence of the Holy Spirit is called fellowship, communion. The apostle speaks of the Holy Spirit's part in the great work of bringing us into true spiritual life, and of His relation to us at all times as "the communion of the Holy Ghost."

Thus is brought into full view, by the benediction, the great and holy name, with all the wideness and riches of the grace of God. The more we look into this matter, the plainer we see the inadaptability of the salutations to the act of blessing. They are insufficient (may we not say deficient?) in the two ends designed in the benediction, namely, the putting upon the children of God the holy name, and conveying to them with that name the most complete and largest measure of blessing. To such exalted use only the Aaronic and apostolic benedictions may aspire.

Still another thought may add a little to the argument. When Christ gave the Church her commission, He said, "Go ye therefore and disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." It is not names, but the one name into which they are to be baptized. The act of baptism inducts them into that name, or puts it upon them. All the three titles form the one name. The act of baptism would be invalidated, and the sacrament be incomplete if it were performed in the name of the Father, and of the Son only. We are not to suppose when Paul had the disciples of John at Ephesus baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, that this name alone was used. This was only the way the writer of the Acts took to designate that they had now received Christian baptism. The fact that they had not heard of the Holy Ghost showed Paul at once that their baptism had not been Christian. It was deficient, not in mode or any such

thing, but in that whereunto they were baptized, and in the name into which that baptism inducted them.

Now, while baptism and the benediction differ in that the latter is not a sacrament, yet they are similar in this, that both these means of grace are instrumental in the putting of the name of God upon His people. The name, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, seems as essential in the one act as in the other. In the Aaronic benediction, the name Jehovah, three times repeated, as foreshadowing this Trinity, has to us the same significance.

In closing this chapter, permit this observation. Those ministers who have misunderstood the commission to preach Christ, and who spend much energy in shouting their shibboleth of "Holy Ghost religion," not knowing that where Christ is faithfully preached, there the Holy Ghost is actively engaged in leading men to the light, almost invariably use a salutation as a benediction. Thus do they practically ignore that Holy Spirit whom they disproportionately exalt. We do not remember as having had come under our observation a single exception to the truth of this statement. That which they most strenuously preach they, in this particular, practically disallow.

The simple sentence salutations do not stand the test as does the apostolic benediction. The comparison just made between them and it more fully shows its fitness as an official blessing, and their unfitness for that act. They are unfit, not for the purpose for which they were written, but for this important ministerial act for which they were not intended. In speaking thus we are not saying anything derogatory of them as parts of the inspired word of God. They have their place and their appropriate use, but it is not to serve the purpose of official blessings. Nothing is gained by so employing them, but really something is lost. The use of the apostolic benediction is permissible only because of its unquestioned fitness for the official act of blessing. The very thing which entitles it to this important position is wanting in the ordinary salutations.

9. The Official Character Of The Act Under The Gospel

THAT THE ACT of pronouncing the benediction was, under the law, purely priestly and official is evident from what has gone before. We have taken for granted that the same is true of the act as performed by the Christian ministry under the gospel. But it seems proper to consider this fact specially, that we may understand more fully why it has the same official significance and force in our worship.

Nearly the whole body of the Christian Church believes that certain men are called of God to the ministry of the word. These are consecrated and ordained, by the laying on of hands, to the holy office of the ministry. “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?” There must be a herald, one who makes official declaration of the “Glad tidings of good things.” “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.” This bearing of tidings, which at Christ’s command took the form of preaching, is in most respects peculiar to the gospel dispensation.

The authority for this office of the gospel ministry is as well founded upon the Scriptures of the New Testament as was the Aaronic priesthood by the Old. As “Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons forever, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister unto Him, and to bless in His name forever,” so the Church still separates men called of God, and ordains them as His ambassadors, to preach the word, to administer the sacraments, and to perform such sacred rites of worship as belong alone to the ministers of the word. The fact that this ministerial office is not a birthright as under the law does not derogate its official character. It was said specially of this, “No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”

Jesus delegated to His apostles such official privileges. “I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” Of this office Paul said, “I thank Jesus Christ our Lord ... for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry-.” And again, “Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle.”

This office of the ministry is quite different from the universal priesthood in which we believe. As is said in i Pet. 2:9, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,” and in Rev. 1:6, “And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father.” But this universal priesthood is not an office. It refers not to ministrations in religious rites, but to the fact that every Christian has the priestly privilege of immediate approach to God; that he may, unrestrained, approach the Lord’s altar and there offer his spiritual sacrifices. Such an act is a priestly function, not necessarily an official one.

The ministry, however, is, according to the New Testament, a holy office to which men are called, and in which they are set apart to administer holy things. The propitiatory character of the Aaronic priesthood is fully assumed by Jesus Christ, though He is not of the order of that priesthood. If Christ were of the Aaronic order it would not mark the end of that priesthood, but because he is after the order of Melchizedek, He, as the great High Priest, the one Mediator between God and man, supersedes the high priest’s office of Aaron, and brings it to an end. The priest’s office, in so far as it pertained to ministrations unto men, to the declaration of God’s word and administration of the means of grace, Christ has delegated to those who are set apart to the office of the gospel ministry. Hence, Paul says, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

We cannot, then, claim for the gospel ministry the same priestly character which belonged to the Levitical priesthood, but aside from that the gospel ministry has the same official and ministerial character. We are not priests in the sense in which they were priests, more than except that we belong to the universal priesthood, but we are ministers in the same sense in which they were. We do not occupy the same mediatorial position, for that is assumed wholly by Christ and is peculiar to Him. But in those acts which pertain to the official declaration of the word and promises of God we occupy the same position. In this sense the gospel ministry supersedes the

Levitical priesthood. Were this not so, there would be no occasion for such an office as that of the gospel ministry.

It would be disastrous to Protestantism to make of the ministerial office a purely sacerdotal institution, but, on the other hand, it is contrary to New Testament teaching to remove from that office all functions of an intermediary character. "I beseech you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." The idea that ministrations at the altar under the gospel contained any propitiatory sacrifice was rejected by Luther and all Protestants, but the official character and efficacy of the declaration of God's word and grace is in nothing inferior to the Levitical propaganda.

The Church has the power to set apart men for the office of the ministry, but not the right to perform some things which belong to that office. It can delegate what it cannot do. Thus, the people in this country elect officers and judges to rule and execute the laws which they themselves have not the power nor right to execute. This appropriately illustrates the position of the body of the members of the Church as to their right to perform ministerial prerogatives.

If, under the old priesthood, it was a glorious act to put the name of God upon the congregation in blessing them, how much more glorious is it under the dominion of grace to bless in the name of the Lord. "For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory." In no particular is the importance of the act of worship lessened by passing of the same from the tabernacle to the temple, from the temple to the Church. Our ministry is as sacred, as exalted, and as efficacious under the gospel as was the priestly ministry when engaged in the symbolical ceremonies of the law. Even more exalted is the office of gospel ministration, for it exceeds the other in glory. And while the ceremonies and paraphernalia of Levitical ritualism have passed away, with the mediatorial character of its priesthood, yet the official essentials of worship still abide, and are even more significant and clear, and are completer in their bestowal of gracious gifts. There has been no degrading of the standard of either moral law or religious worship. There is, on the other hand, a greater efficiency in the word preached and a fuller manifestation of the grace bestowed through the ministrations of God's appointed ministers. So the official character and gracious blessings of the benediction remain, and possess even fuller meaning and force under the gospel ministry.

10. Importance Of Act

FROM THE FOREGOING it will be seen that the act of pronouncing the benediction is one of the most important of the ministerial office. It is one of the special privileges of that office; one of the few things which mark the official character of the ministry; one of the things for which those who officiate at the altar are set apart. All men, except ordained ministers, are proscribed here. Lest some may think the writer is making a mistake in using the words "officiate at the altar," in this connection, he wishes to state that the expression is used, not in the specific sense in which it is when we speak of services at the altar as over against pulpit service. The benediction is not intercessory, but belongs to those acts which the minister performs when he has turned from the altar and bears God's message to the worshipers. The words, as here and elsewhere used refer to the character of the office, not of this special official act.

The act is one of the best things in a ministry of good things. There is a potency in it. It is a ministration of gracious blessing to all who have sincerely worshiped, to all the children of God. It is not only a means of grace in that it is the word of God, but it is the pronouncement and assurance of the present active operation of grace. With the act goes the comforting promise, that by the declaration the minister puts the Lord's name upon His people, and that God blesses them. If there seems to be a mystery here, we should remember that all communication of grace is mysterious. All things that pertain to the imparting of spiritual gifts and life are most mysterious. From that greatest mystery – the incarnation – until the work is completed and our souls shall pass the boundary of this life into the eternal glories, all things which concern our salvation are full of wonders, and shrouded by the veil which separates the unseen from the seen. After all, much that concerns life has to be taken upon faith. But the blessing, however mysterious in the transmission, is as real and as truly given. We experience the good designed by the blessing, though we cannot comprehend its transmission to us, just as truly as we derive good from the

products of the soil, though no one understands the process of their growth or their assimilation by our body. This communicating of the blessing is just what the Lord assures us takes place. "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

Yet we must not ascribe to the benediction a magical influence or power. The act must be freed from all superstition. It was the almost universal belief in ancient times, that magic spells or incantations pronounced over individuals for good or evil had an irresistible power. Thus Balak sent for Balaam that he should come and curse Israel. Even today many people hold such views. Whatever God may pronounce accursed will be accursed, and whatever He may bless will be blessed, but man's cursings or blessings mean nothing unless they conform to God's will. Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim teach us the great lesson, that while the blessing or the curse is not without God's power, neither are they independent of our own choice and conduct. Neither the one nor the other can come upon us without our consent. The blessing of the benediction is alone to them who believe God's promises, to those who in such faith come before Him with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Of necessity there can be no blessing in it for anyone who spurns the name and grace of God. Dr. E. T. Horn quotes Luther as saying of the benedictions, "They are not wish blessings, but actual benedictions, wherewith such good things are handed and given to us." If a man "despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering," how can he expect that the Lord's benediction will bring to him anything but greater hardness and impenitence of heart?

The thought is, that while the benediction is a real blessing, and the minister in the act of pronouncing it is the intermediary agent, yet the blessing is not imposed, it is not an arbitrary gift. It is a free and gracious gift, yet it is not bestowed upon the unwilling and scornful. The higher, fuller things of the means of grace are not operative unless there be a receptive mind and believing heart. The benediction declares the imparting of God's fullest grace, but it is no blessing to anyone who does not receive it as such, and abides therein. However earnestly the minister may desire, pray, and labor that God's love, grace, and spiritual communion may reach the sinner with saving power, yet he pronounces the benediction for and upon the believer, and its benefits are to him only. To him it is potential for good, else the Lord had never said, "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, . . . and they shall put my name upon them, and I will bless them."

So, while there is nothing in the act of the nature which ignorance has ascribed to magic spells and incantations, yet it is potential in its benefits.

Right here it may be proper to make this statement as to the grammatical construction of the benedictions. They are in the imperative mode. The force of the Hebrew verbs in the Aaronic benediction is that of the apocopated or jussive future, and indicates a mild command. Our English translation is a very accurate expression of the verbal force of the benedictions. "The force of this mode under the same form depends upon the relation of the parties. If a superior speaks imperatively to an inferior, it is a command; if to an equal, it is an exhortation or an entreaty; if an inferior to a superior, it is a prayer or supplication." God is commanding His blessing upon His believing children; not arbitrarily, but nevertheless positively. He wills and affirms that those who receive in faith be blessed. The minister is superior to the congregation only as to his office, but he pronounces the benediction officially. He is not imploring that blessing, not praying for it, not entreating them to receive it, but he is declaring it in the Lord's name – namely, by the Lord's authority. He is commanding that blessing upon those who receive it in faith, when he repeats the message and declaration which the Lord has authorized him to make. It is not in his power to confer the blessing as coming from himself, but it is in his power to transmit it; and he does so, not as an invocation, nor imploringly, nor as an exhortation, but imperatively. There is no subjunctive uncertainty, there is no contingent condition, so that one officiating should say, "And now may the Lord bless (if He will)." On the one hand is the Lord, ready to bless, yes, more ready than we can conceive; on the other hand is His child, believing and trustful, ready to be blessed. The Lord commands the blessing upon that believer by the mouth of His minister. He who said, "Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years" (Lev. 25:21), has provided that His spiritual blessings be announced and imparted imperatively. We are, then, not to hold a low estimate of the importance of the official act of blessing, nor are we to esteem its benefits lightly. It is a potent declaration of grace to all who hold the word of God in faith. "We are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." On the same ground are we made partakers of the fullness of the blessing imperatively pronounced in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

11. Manner Of Pronouncing And Receiving The Benediction

FROM WHAT HAS BEEN SAID, it must be apparent to all that there should be care and reverence on the part of both minister and congregation in this part of divine services. That we, who are but men, have been set apart to officiate in holy things, is altogether a most serious matter. That we have been delegated to put God's name upon His people is a great and holy responsibility. The mind of the minister, when he is engaged in the discharge of his sacred duties, should be clear. He should be fully alive to the fact that he is the ambassador of God, a mouthpiece to declare the Lord's mercy and grace. In no part of the service is that declaration more vivid than when he extends his hand over the assembled worshipers and blesses them.

As for the people, there is no moment more solemn and impressive than that. There is no part of the service which furnishes greater occasion for holy joy and spiritual comfort. Here is a sign and token that the Lord has heard their prayers and is answering them; that salvation has now come upon them. This is no mere form, and should by no means be regarded simply as a customary and neat way of closing services. It is rather the grand culmination towards which the whole act of worship, with its prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, has tended, namely, God's spoken response to His child who has drawn near unto Him.

Attitude of the Minister.

The attitude of the minister should not be that of prayer. He is not praying to God, but proclaiming God's message and conveying His blessing. When the minister draws near to God in prayer, he properly closes his eyes, for God is not to be looked upon. He and the congregation are communing with

a spiritual Father, who is worshiped in spirit and in truth; then the world is shut out. In this reference is made only to extempore prayer, and it is not in any way to refer to those prayers which are read in parts of a regularly prescribed service. But when we, as ministers of the Word, come from the Father's presence with His message to His beloved, we ought to declare that message, or pronounce His word with eyes open. That expresses our confidence in the message we bring. What would our forefathers have thought if the heralds who went in every direction proclaiming independence and liberty had done so with eyes closed, as if in prayer?

There is no more reason for closing the eyes when pronouncing the benediction than when preaching; there is the same reason for having them open in both acts. Both belong to the same class, there being this difference, that the preaching is general in character, while the benediction is specific; the one is the proclamation of grace to all, the other is to believers only.

Long custom, however, has firmly fixed upon us the habit of pronouncing God's blessing with eyes closed. To do otherwise would look strange, and would be considered by many as an act of sacrilege. Hence the friend to whom we are indebted for this thought, and who never hesitates to advocate any and all convictions he may have, said: "But I have never had the courage to do it." In that he voiced the feelings of the writer and of others. But eventually, when we come to understand the matter better, we will not hesitate to offer and bestow God's name and blessing with eyes open to them for whom it is designed. That such is the proper attitude must be apparent to all who duly consider the matter.

Position of the Hand.

Related to the above is the position of the hand or hands. This seems such a small matter that no doubt some will say, "What is the difference?" This is an external matter, it is true, and one quite unessential. That is, it would be a benediction without the use of the hands, or if a minister were so unfortunate as to lose his hands. Yet, as the hand or hands are used, there is a significance in that use. While we do a thing we might as well do it properly. The hands have a language of their own. One motion may express one idea, another quite a different one. The child knows very well what is meant when we hold out our hands to invite it to our arms. Teachers of

oratory lay stress upon motion and attitude on the part of the speaker. We will observe, in listening to a polished orator, that every motion is in harmony with his thought. The writer heard this criticism of one of our most distinguished statesmen and orators. "Everything spoke – his hands, his spectacles, his handkerchief." That impression was made simply because the orator used his body in harmony with his thoughts.

There are certain positions of the hands which express petition; quite different ones denote the conferring of a blessing. Thus, the hands held low, with palms turned upward, denotes petition. Under great excitement and earnestness the hands would be raised, but palms still turned upward or together. That expresses humility and want. But in conferring a favor, a blessing, or granting a request the hand would naturally be held just the opposite, higher, with palms outward and downward, towards and over the congregation. The use of the hand in the benediction is to typify the placing of the hand upon the head. Jacob placed his hands upon the heads of the sons of Joseph. Jesus laid His hands upon the children and blessed them. We are informed that the high priest today holds his hands thus, using both hands, with thumbs touching each other and forefingers touching each other, but with palms outward towards and over the congregation.

Now, in officiating before a congregation, laying the hand upon the head would be impossible, so Aaron lifted up his hand towards the people (Lev. 9:22). Likewise to His disciples, at His ascension, Jesus "lifted up His hands and blessed them."

It seems evident that in the benediction the hand is used in token of the "laying on of hands," and is emblematic of that. It is the act of conferring a blessing, and the hand should be extended towards the people, with palm outward and downward. Years back one would have always seen the benediction given in this way. But later a fad went the rounds of the ministry that the benediction should be pronounced with the hands low and palms upward. That completed the conversion of the benediction into a prayer. First the closing of the eyes, then changing the words into a form of prayer, and finally the holding of the hands in the position of supplication, no wonder the benediction has been defined as a prayer.

The Amen.

The amen is properly the response of the people, and not in the benediction itself. The best manuscripts give no amen to the apostolic benediction, neither is there any in the Aaronic benediction. That, we judge, was for the congregation to supply, and we have good evidence that it was so used. It was evidently introduced into the text later by some copyist, because it was the common practice to make such a response, and other copyists followed his example.

The Lord directed that when the children of Israel should reach their promised inheritance they should proceed to the mountains Gerizim and Ebal, and there, with half the tribes on one mountain and half on the other, all the curses and blessings declared in the law should be read, and to each one all the people should say, "Amen." Those on Mount Gerizim, we understand, responded thus to the blessings, and those on Mount Bbal, to the curses.

At the close of David's psalm of thanksgiving, when he had brought the ark to the tent which had been prepared for it in the city of David, "All the people said, Amen." At the close of Psalm cvi., in which David praises God for His wonderful providence manifested towards the children of Israel, are the words, "Let all the people say. Amen, Hallelujah." A few other instances are given, several of which are in the Apocalypse, showing that it was common to thus express assent to the worship which preceded.

However, the passage which has the most decisive bearing upon this matter, and which shows that the practice was common in the days of the apostles, is found in 1 Cor. 14:16, "Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the place of the unlearned say 'The Amen' at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandest not what thou sayest?" The article before Amen is in the Greek text, but was omitted in the King James Version. It has been restored by the Revised Version, and greatly strengthens the passage. It shows that such a response was the customary practice in the early Church; so customary that he refers to it as "The Amen." So, when the minister blesses the congregation in the name of the Lord, "Let all the people say. Amen."

The Pause, or Silent Prayer.

In this act of divine worship God comes very nigh unto His people. That presence, which made even the ground holy, so that Moses had need to remove his shoes from off his feet, is with them. It is a precious and solemn moment. The congregation should be taught to realize it. The assembly should not at once begin to break up in confusion. It is not seemly that confusion should reign when the words of blessing have scarcely left the minister's lips.

Neither does it become the office of the ministry, nor is it in conformity to the solemnity of worship, that the minister should rush to the door to shake hands and otherwise entertain the people socially. If they have gathered in the right spirit, it is for purposes of worship, and that should not be lost sight of by such a mechanical and professional style of handshaking. It is all right for Christians to greet their fellow Christians, and the stranger, and show a real brotherly interest at such a time. But the confusion-working professional handshaking, which has become the custom with many ministers, may be abandoned to the very great spiritual advantage of the congregation, who by it lose sight of the spiritual blessings which the worship should have wrought.

After the blessing is a moment, the holy influence of which is too important, too full of spiritual uplift, to be lost in the confusion of unimportant conversation and the putting on of wraps. There is no time in all the hour of worship when God's people may more fittingly stand a few moments with reverential attitude and commune with God. The communion of the Holy Spirit is with them. This is not a mere form. Oh, no! It is but proper conduct in such a presence, and betokens a devotional spirit. Why should it be thought an evidence of spirituality to be informal and irreverent in the Lord's house? Why is proper decorum in worship regarded by many as formalism?

Let us go into the house of God with the multitude. Our reverential frame of mind may be disturbed by the fact that no order is observed as to the parts of the service. There seems to have been no preparation for it. The minister must even say, "Brethren, sing something;" and then there is a long, tedious waiting, which shows that no brother has selected any hymn. The same indefiniteness pervades the whole service. And when such a congregation has received what should have been God's blessing there is general clatter of tongues, lively gossip, straining into overcoats, and,

perhaps, even putting on of hats. As we depart we will hear someone say, “What a spiritual service!”

Let us again go into the house of God with the multitude. The people come to their seating with manifest reverence. There is no uncertainty about the service. All is calm and devotional. Every part of the service has been provided for, and is “done decently and in order.” When the blessing is spoken, the people respond with the “Amen,” and all remain silent and devotional, then in a few moments begin to disperse quietly. Some say, as we walk with the multitude away, “How formal! How cold and lifeless!”

Why do such persons thus differently estimate the services? Because to them informality is spirituality, and in their minds emotionalism and spirituality are confused. Informality and formalism are akin, and when they are mingled many persons cannot discern the fact, nor distinguish between them. They both are monstrosities in the house of God. Formalism is so nearly related to bad form that the informal formalist cannot discern that his bad form in the house of God is real formalism. In his opinion, the man who worships God with becoming conduct and appropriate ways is a formalist, and wanting in spiritual life.

But true forms are germane to true worship, and when formalism is introduced among these true forms, even in the slightest degree, it becomes apparent, just as the wolf will be easily recognized when in the sheepfold. Whether the one who worships God in reverential ways, and according to good form, is more likely to become a formalist than the man who ignores even proper reverence and common decorum in the house of God, ought not to be difficult to decide.

On the other hand, too extreme a ritualistic worship may be subject to the same dangers that surround too great laxness. Our plea is for proper reverence, proper decorum in the house of God. Nowhere do improprieties appear more abundant and more glaring than when the benediction is pronounced. It ought to be as inspiring a moment as any in the whole service. God’s beneficent presence should be keenly realized. We should not abide in that presence a moment without proper demeanor, nor should we depart therefrom in a thoughtless manner. It is a time of divine grace, love, and peace, all “too full for sound or foam.” In the blessing and joy of that moment we should bow our heads and abide a little longer with the Lord. It is the final moment we spend in His house before we depart in peace.

12. Where And When Proper To Make Use Of Benedictions

BENEDICTIONS have been pronounced at meetings of every description, and under nearly all circumstances. Perhaps it will continue to be so till the end of time. There doubtless will always be some who think there is a sort of virtue and grandeur in overriding all customs and rules of propriety.

“Christianity,” say they, “must be up to date, must throw off narrow ways, and must partake of the broad, liberal views and practices of the times.” There is no consecrated vessels of sacred worship, no holy acts of ministerial service, no choice pearls of sacred truth which such ones do not cast right and left without reserve, little heeding whether they fall among swine or not. That sort of thing takes with a certain class for awhile. But people soon tire of a minister whose predominant characteristic is his swagger. We are thankful there are few such. As compared with the whole body of ministers in all denominations there are but few who treat the holy things of their office with irreverence. Most ministers seek to magnify their office, seek and strive to render to the Lord the best service, and in ways which are becoming to the house of God. The general tendency is towards better and more appropriate ways in worship. That we so often fail of the best ways is because, in our busy life, we have not taken time to duly study all subjects which belong to our work.

The benediction seems such a little and insignificant part of divine service that few guess its importance. Hence, it has received slight attention at the hand of writers upon Biblical subjects and questions of worship. There has been such wide misconception as to the true character of the act, and such an underrating of its sanctity, that benedictions have been frequently pronounced under what are, to say the least, very questionable circumstances. When we examine the subject many questions arise as to what are proper circumstances and conditions under which it may be employed.

It differs in this respect from most parts of divine service. We may use different parts of such service on almost any occasion and anywhere; not so the benediction. Reading of Scripture, prayer, singing, and exhortation may be engaged in among the impenitent, and in the very haunts of wickedness. But we do not offer the Communion under such circumstances, nor would it be in place to pronounce the benediction there, for hearts are not prepared for these. Those other parts of service just mentioned belong to the gospel proclamation in the general sense, and are for the world as well as the Church, but these belong to the specific offer which God makes to His own people, those of the household of faith.

The blessing, as an official declaration, cannot in any truthfulness be said to be with the impenitent and hardened sinner. It is not because God is not willing and ready to bless men everywhere, but because they have not faith, without which they cannot receive blessings. Such rest under the wrath of God because of sin, and where such is the case it would be folly for God's ministers to declare the contrary. If we cannot call that common and unclean which God has cleansed, neither can we call that clean which God has not cleansed.

This seeming to withhold from those beyond the Church some of the sacred parts of worship is not selfishness on the part of the Church and her ministry. Whatever faults the Church may have been accused of, she is not selfish in her ministrations of the means of grace. Ministers are ever ready to go, when called upon, into the very haunts of sin, there to minister to the wants of some needy soul. But there are some things, even in the work of gracious ministrations, with which we ought not to play fast and loose. This is one of them. We win no souls by calling black white, or by calling evil good. But when the soul is won, then we bring most blessed help and comfort by declaring that "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost," is with that soul.

Just when and where it is proper to use the benediction is not always easily determined. The circumstances under which ministers are asked to pronounce it are too numerous to mention. In some of the situations it seems quite inappropriate. Only in a general way can one attempt to point out under what conditions it may be fittingly given. This general rule may be applied, and will determine most cases, if not all. The benediction presupposes worship, or some act of a sacred or religious character. A gathering must be of such a character, and some thought must be given to

these sacred things, and some act must indicate participation in these things to prepare for and call it forth. Then only by right does it, like the Holy Communion, belong to believers.

It is always proper in divine worship, in the administration of the sacraments, baptism, and the Holy Communion. It is proper at the marriage of believers. Upon the same condition it is proper at burial services, and in any other case where the rule applies. There may be funerals where one could hardly with propriety use the benediction at the grave. There was wisdom in closing the burial service in the “Ministerial Acts” with Heb. 13:20, 21 – “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” This is not a benediction, though some books of forms so designate it. It is an invocation, closing with an ascription of glory to Christ. No more suitable passage could have been selected for the purpose. But when officiating at funerals among our Christian families, a benediction may suitably follow even this grand passage. Any gathering of the Lord’s people, where some thought has been given to things which pertain to the kingdom of Christ and religious life, is given full permission to consummate these sacred things with the benediction.

13. Mistakes Corrected

THERE SEEM TO US TO BE great misconceptions as to this part of divine service, and quite a number of improprieties and mistakes consequently exist. While the discussion, thus far, has made some of these evident, it seems proper to refer to them again, and in the same connection point out others. This is done, not in a censorious spirit, but with the kind desire of helping to attain the best things. We trust it may seem to no one an unkind act. The surgeon uses the knife with the kindest intentions; we are sure a few plainly spoken corrections will be far from as keen an operation.

Frankness compels one to admit that many Protestant Churches have been very careless in forms and modes of worship. The benediction has come in for its full share of carelessness and misconception. But it is too important a matter for us to continue to make unwarranted errors therein. Because of the improprieties in use in this connection very many of our members have not the least conception of the nature and meaning of the act. Certain it is, many ministers might improve in the forms used, and the manner of using them. The writer confesses that for many years he was both ignorant and errant, and deeply deploras that when he entered the ministry there was not placed in his hands such a work as this.

Not a Dismissal.

One mistaken conception of the benediction is the idea that it is simply a dismissal. In the estimation of many it is but the formal way the minister has of telling the people that he is through, and they may now go home. Every minister has been asked to dismiss the congregation with the benediction. We are asked to dismiss in this way social functions, secular picnics, educational and farmers' institutes, even sometimes political gatherings, and many other meetings, as well as those of a religious character. It is not a dismissal in fact, but a blessing of the people in the

name of the Lord. The benediction is often used in other parts of the service as well as at the close. Thus we bless those who have communed.

It is not simply a form by which we close the service, something which it is admissible we perform in a perfunctory manner, but it is the climax in the most exalted thing a man ever does, namely, the worship of Almighty God. The whole worship, or some part of it, culminates in God's response, by the mouth of His chosen minister, to the prayers, praises, and thanksgiving of His people. This is quite different from any mere dismissal, quite different from thanking an audience for listening attentively to a speech or concert. We bless the worshipers in the name of the Lord, afterward they depart in peace.

Want of Reverence.

The phrase "want of reverence" is used because there may be no intended act of irreverence. Reverential demeanor becomes one while in God's house, and especially while engaged in worship. A flippant, careless repetition of the glorious words of the benediction, as if they have no particular significance, is a sad mistake. The writer once heard the remark, "The tumultuous way in which congregations break up is largely due to the manner in which the benediction is pronounced." Very sacred is the trust which God has committed to our keeping, in that He has appointed us to bear His holy name before the people, and to put it upon those who believe. When we bless the people we should feel as Moses must have felt when he came down from the mount from communing with God. It is a moment as precious, as sacred. There should be no want of reverence. Let him who ministers realize it. Let the people pause. It is not the minister who is blessing; he speaks the words only. In, with, and by his voice the still small voice of God is speaking to the heart. Surely the Lord is in this place. With reverence give, and with reverence receive. His word. "In His presence is fullness of joy."

Incorrect Forms.

Another mistake, a very common and yet serious one, is that of incorrectness in the wording of the benediction. It appears to be against such mistakes that the Lord warned Aaron and his sons when He said concerning the words of blessing which He put in their mouth, “On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them” thus and so. We ought not to think that the coming in of the law of grace has in any way lowered the standard of excellence in holy ministrations. Any change in either benediction will impair its high excellence. Surely no one would deliberately presume to change either.

We find, however, many deviations from the words of the text, often at the sacrifice not only of the form, but of the very purpose and intent of the act. See how true that is of the following, which is frequently heard: “And now may the grace of God the Son, and the love of God the Father, and the communion and fellowship of God the Holy Ghost be and abide with you now and forevermore. Amen.” There is no such benediction in the book. In fact, it is not a benediction at all, it is a prayer. The sentence has been taken from its proper mode, and expresses subjectively the desire of the one speaking. There is a vast difference between praying that the Lord’s blessing may descend and abide upon the congregation, and the pronouncement of the fact that that blessing has come upon the congregation and belongs to the believers present, and that God wills that they be blessed. The real purpose of the benediction is entirely lost sight of in the change of form. Besides, the general wording is objectionable in that it is tautological. Another objection to it is that it attempts to impress the doctrine of the Trinity by overstating the Scripture. We gain nothing by overstatement. The doctrine of the Trinity does not need any such exaggeration of the Scripture to support it.

The following form, also often used, is equally objectionable: “And now may the blessing of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be with you all evermore.” We search the Scriptures in vain for a warrant for such a form of blessing. It expresses God’s name in unwarranted terms, but does not express fully His mercy and grace. Such terms are doubtless proper in formulating dogmatical statements, but are exceedingly improper in acts of worship. They are pretended quotations of God’s word, but they are not His word, and in that sense are quite untrue. Certainly, no one would purposely falsify in quoting the holy words of God, but such a grave departure from the true text is false and misleading. Another very common, but incorrect,

wording of the benediction is, “Grace, mercy, and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with you all.” This is, perhaps, least objectionable of all erroneous forms. All sorts of changes are rung upon it. Inasmuch as it has been shown elsewhere that it is not a true Scripture quotation, its erroneous character needs no other demonstration.

Upon our table are two books of forms for various services. These books are designed to aid pastors in the discharge of certain public official duties. The writer was a pastor some years before either was published, so they are not selected from the distant past. One gives a list under the title, Benedictions. Some of these are salutations; also the Aaronic and apostolic benedictions are given; but let us quote one or two others from the list. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, enabling you to receive the truth in the love of it, to do the will of God from the heart, and keeping you unto His kingdom and glory. Amen.” How strange that anyone should offer this as a substitute for the exceedingly fine benedictions in God’s word. It shows a complete misapprehension of the nature and purpose of the benediction. Bad as it is, this is worse: “Grace be with us all, enabling us by faith to receive the great salvation, and ever pray and labor for its diffusion till it is made known to the ends of the earth.” This remarkable effusion needs no comments. The other book quotes the Pauline benediction correctly, except the last clause, which is made to read, “be with us all evermore. Amen.” How can the minister be at one and the same time the agent through whom a blessing is conferred and the object upon whom the blessing is bestowed? This mistake of defining the recipients designated in the benediction as being in the first person instead of the second is not uncommon. It is a mistake which defeats the purpose for which the Lord commanded His ministers to bless in His name.

We hold the word of God as the inspired and only rule in religious faith and practice. The Lord generously grants us, who minister before Him, the privilege of expounding that word and ministering to the needs of the souls of men in our own language, as long as we are faithful to His revealed truth; but He does not give us the right of changing and bungling His express words and messages to men. In the benediction we are not expounding the word, but are repeating the Lord’s message of blessing word for word. We must make a distinction between the sermon and the text; the sermon is our own word, the text is the Lord’s. We may change our words, and even preach different sermons from the same text, but the text changes not; it is

God's word. When God says to His ministering servants, "Go, say to my people" thus and so, it certainly will take large presumption on our part to change the message in the slightest way. Why should we take liberties with the Lord's word which the sheriff would not take with an edict of the judges in our civil courts? Did not the Lord say, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it"? (Deut. 12:32). We cannot believe that the Lord has receded from this position. So when He says, "On this wise ye shall bless, saying," we certainly ought not to change His words into some fanciful message or prayer of our own. Surely the offense is more largely due to a want of consideration than to deliberate design.

It is not necessary to quote any other mistakes along this line, though their name is legion. Rather let us again look at the grand but simple language of the benedictions. There is nothing in all the language which is more comprehensive and full of meaning, yet so plain and childlike:

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:

"The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."

Mizpah Dismissal.

Another mistake which is sometimes made is the ascribing to the Mizpah dismissal of our Young People's Societies the name and dignity of a benediction. We have heard it called "The Mizpah Benediction," "The C. E. Benediction," and "Our own C. E. Benediction." It is not a benediction, as it lacks the essentials of one, both as to source and contents. The organizers of the Christian Endeavor Society did not incorporate it into the service of the society as a benediction, but rather for the very reason that it is not one. The un-ordained are not authorized to pronounce an unofficial blessing, so this passage, which is simply a salutation expressing the desire and prayer for God's watchful care during separation, was chosen as an appropriate closing. It is appropriate for the purpose. What is here said is not against the act itself, but to correct the wrong impression that it is a benediction. This thought applies to all such cases. The Woman's Home and Foreign

Missionary Society has made the same mistake with respect to its closing service. To use a benediction in such a connection and way would be very much out of place; to call any other Scripture so used, however appropriate, a benediction is a mistake. It is a dismissal, possibly a salutation. There is no authority connected with its use.

Unauthorized Use.

Frequently young men who are preparing for the ministry are called upon to hold services before they have advanced sufficiently to receive ordination, or even licensure. Unless their minds have been directed to this subject there is a possibility of making the mistake of assuming to act in an official capacity. The mistake is sometimes made. It certainly places the young man, whose experience in such matters is necessarily limited, in a difficult situation. It is not an easy matter to supply a suitable form in such a case, especially as the congregation may not understand why the services are not closed in the usual way. In that case the congregation ought to be told frankly of the difficulty, and be asked to repeat with the leader some suitable psalm, or, better still, the Lord's Prayer. If they are made to understand the situation they will appreciate the young man's intelligence, and perhaps learn a good truth besides; but if they are not told, they may ascribe his unusual way of closing services to his ignorance, and they themselves remain in ignorance. For all such cases, where no minister is present, there is nothing as suitable and good as the Lord's Prayer. No one will mistake it for a benediction.

Mr. D. H. Moody once defined the difference between himself and an ordained minister as consisting in the fact that he had no right to pronounce the benediction over the people. That was so far correct. He was a careful student of the word, and he realized that it debarred him from performing official ministerial acts. But some lesser lights in the so-called evangelistic field, who tried to imitate Moody, did not know that he, under no circumstances, presumed to bless the people, neither did they understand the Scriptures as well, and so assumed to themselves unwarranted privileges.

Ministers of the gospel were always present in Mr. Moody's meetings, so the situation presented no difficulty. But a young man, yet un-ordained,

working in some mission field, or supplying some vacant pulpit, does not find himself so favorably situated. While he may find the situation embarrassing, yet let him, with all reverence for the holy office, bide the time when he, too, with propriety may lift up his hand towards the people and bless them in the name of the Lord.

The Use of the Salutation.

The position has been taken that the briefer salutations of the epistles ought not to be used as benedictions. We think this position is taken on good and sufficient grounds. They are very frequently used in this way, however. The comprehensive character of the two benedictions does away with the necessity of their use. The salutation has its proper place. Thus, in the Common Service we have the salutation, "The Lord be with you," but it is not introduced as a benediction. There have been times in the history of the Church, at least in some quarters, when a different benediction was prescribed for nearly every special service. There was one for blessing church buildings, another for sacred utensils, and a different one for every different kind of service. Some were simple salutations, some were the salutations elaborated, some were the apostolic benediction elaborated after the fashion already quoted under "Incorrect Forms." What would an intelligent congregation think to hear a minister bless them in this way? – "May God, our Father, protect and prosper us. May Jesus Christ teach and guide, comfort and encourage us. May the spirit of the Lord ennoble us. Amen." Yet this benediction is taken from a liturgy. There has always, it seems, been the tendency to change the benedictions. The greater the rationalistic tendency of the times, the more pronounced have been the departure from the true Biblical forms. We may look for some such developments from the destructive criticism of the present time.

The disposition in some quarters seems to be to curtail. There is impatience at giving so much time to the act, hence the briefer and even briefest salutations are used. This seems reprehensible. It certainly must be apparent to all who investigate the question that the only blessing which has a positive command back of it is the Aaronic, and of all the epistolary salutations only one meets the purpose of this blessing in scope and form. These two alone answer the purpose for which the benediction was

instituted in Num. 6:22-27. They alone are incapable of improvement, are the best and only comprehensive ones in the Bible. It certainly is a mistake to use something as a benediction which is less complete, something which does not express fully God's holy name, nor define the greatness of His kindnesses and mercy.

Now, the question naturally arises, "If the briefer salutations are not official benedictions, may not un-ordained evangelists and other laymen use them in lieu of the benediction?" Hardly, at least not as a benediction or in place of one. Any Christian might salute his brother; any Christian might write a letter to a brother Christian and very properly say to him, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." But to do that in public worship, in imitation of the official act, and to supply the place of it, would be manifestly out of place. Such an act would result in confusion, as most persons would not be able to distinguish between the proper official blessing and this unofficial imitation of it. We will do well to keep our worship free from every sort of imitation of the genuine and essential acts of worship. There can be no reason for using the salutations in such a place in public worship except as benedictions, and to this the layman ought not to presume.

We are fully convinced that only the Aaronic and apostolic benedictions may be properly used in this act of worship, and then only by those who are authorized by ordination to the office of the ministry. Should any brother minister think that the conclusion arrived at is too extreme and narrow, that it places unwarranted limitations upon his liberty in the exercise of his ministerial functions, let him give the matter this practical test. Let him for one year bless his congregation in the name of the Lord with the reverence and care herein advocated, then let him go into some service, a solemn spiritual service even, and at its close hear some minister indifferently say, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," and if he does not go from the house of God feeling that for some reason the service was incomplete, that somehow it has failed of attaining its full purpose, then he may use the salutation ever after. The writer recently had just such an experience. Our brother will go back to his own pulpit on the next Lord's Day and bless his people "on this wise" with more reverence and care than ever before. In other words, the Aaronic and Pauline benedictions carry with their proper pronouncement a helpfulness and good which is found in no brief salutation nor in any other Scripture used in their stead. The best

argument for their use is, after all, their constant and proper use. The best argument against the use of the salutation as a benediction is, that after one has tasted of the Lord's full blessing as pronounced in the true benedictions, the salutation ever after causes an unpleasant sense of their unfitness for this exalted ministerial act.

14. Résumé

IT MAY NOT SEEM NECESSARY in so small a work as this to recapitulate what has been set forth. However, we deem it wise, for the purpose of both stating the truths discussed with more clearness, and fastening them more firmly in the mind, to append this brief resume:

1. The act of pronouncing a blessing upon God's people has the clearest authority. It rests upon the most positive command, and is confirmed by the practice of our Lord. While there is no direct command to use the apostolic benediction, yet it so fully meets the purpose of the blessing which the Lord made known to Moses that we accord it a place on an equality with the Aaronic benediction.
2. The act of pronouncing the benediction is purely an official function, one of the things for which the priest or minister is set apart from other believers. It belongs alone and exclusively to the office of divine ministration. The official authority of the ministers of Christ is in this the same as the priests under the law. It is their special prerogative to minister in the holy things of God, and to bless in His name.
3. It is not optional on the part of the minister whether he bless or not. It is the Lord's command that he shall bless, and it is the privilege of the people to claim that blessing, if by repentance and faith they have placed themselves in the way of it. It cannot be withheld from them, because it is their right. As the Lord has appointed His minister to bless in His name, equally has He appointed that His people shall be blessed.
4. The benediction is an important part of the service of God's house, far more so than is generally supposed. Its significance is greater than its brevity would seem to indicate. It is not a mere form which has been prepared for a suitable closing to the worship, but it is the consummation of divine blessings which flow from that worship. It is

- the naming of His name upon the people, and a conferring of the blessings which accompany that name.
5. It is not a prayer either in form or design. It neither expresses petition to God nor indicates any other manner by which we approach Him.. But it is God's message to us by His chosen servants. In the act the attitude of prayer is not the proper one; but we who officiate, with open eyes and outstretched hand, pronounce it as the ambassadors of God, declaring His word to men. We are not praying for a blessing, but are the instruments conveying it.
 6. The benediction presupposes some act of worship or sacred service. Hence it belongs alone to believers. A prayer for blessing may be made on behalf of all men; but a declaration or pronouncement of the Lord's blessing can only be for those to whom it belongs by virtue of their faith in the promise. There is no blessing in it for those who believe not. The blessing is not arbitrarily imposed, though it is a gracious gift.
 7. The act is wholly out of place in a secular meeting. The subject-matter under consideration may be moral, educational, and beneficial, but that does not make it a suitable occasion for the benediction. The presupposed conditions are not present. It is the crowning act in worship, the Lord's response to those who have drawn nigh unto Him.

Therefore, the act is not in place under the conditions which obtain in a purely secular meeting.

8. It is a means of grace to all who believe. Not only in that sense in which all Scripture is a means of grace,, but also in that it is a special declaration of the present active operation of that grace. The act is intended to be a conveyance of grace and salvation to those who have faith, for it is the placing of that name upon God's children, through which name men are saved. "For there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." So it becomes an actual bestowal of blessing.
9. Care should be used in the way we bless, both as to the words used and the manner of using them. We are communicating God's word and message, not our own. We are performing one of the most responsible and sacred duties of the ministerial office. We should handle that word

with reverence, and we should have no doubt of its efficacy and power. We are bearing His name unto men, and must have respect to His promise that He will bless.

10. Care should also be taken that we may not confuse some other passage of the word, however precious, with those which are truly authorized benedictions. Neither is the Mizpah parting nor a mere salutation to be given the title and dignity which belong to the blessing. Lacking in some one or more particulars when compared with the standard which the Lord has established, we should do more than hesitate to use the salutations as benedictions. We should not use them as benedictions, nor call them such.
11. The Amen is intended as a response on the part of the congregation. That evidently was the practice in apostolic times. It is a most appropriate practice. It is the assent of God's people to His blessing; a very solemn acceptance of His name and salvation. When any part is as clearly authorized as the Amen response to the benediction, it seems unwise not to introduce it more generally in our churches.

15. Conclusion

THERE ARE SOME COMMON FEATURES which enter into the worship of all evangelical Christian churches, whether they be liturgical or non-liturgical. They are such things as the Lord's Prayer, the words of Christ in dispensing the bread and wine, the formula of baptism, and the benediction. These are commonly accepted and used among all believers. They enter to a greater or less extent into the worship of all denominations. Here the sacramental hosts of God occupy common ground. These, with the common word which we preach, and the one Spirit of whom we have all received, indicate the oneness, the spiritual unity of all believers.

While men will, doubtless, have many and varied conceptions of the word of God, and will hold different views of prayer, the Lord's supper, baptism, and the benediction, yet through all these diversities shines the one clear light that it is the Lord's Prayer which we all use; that in the Lord's own words are dispensed the bread and the wine; that with His own formula proper subjects are baptized and received into the Church, and with His own blessing do His ministers bless His people. Only when rationalism has entered the Church and with blighting effect has breathed its soulless spirit into her worship have these, the universal and precious possessions of all Christian worshipers, been radically changed or widely departed from. They are, in a sense, the pulse of the spiritual life of the Church. Only when the Church for a season became unevangelical, when her life became a mere moral cultus, and her, worship deformed, has she ever permitted the substitution of platitudes for these divinely-given and vital parts of worship. Wherever and whenever radical tendencies lay hold upon the ministry, and an attempt is made to set aside evangelical spiritual truth, and to run the Church on purely a moral and humanitarian basis, then men begin to amend the Lord's Prayer, pervert Christ's words of consecration, seek new and original formula for baptism, and substitute no very exalted words of their own for the majestic words of God's benedictions. This fact is seen in the liturgical deterioration of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹

Whatever may be said against a hyper-ritualistic worship, it is deserving of credit in this, that it deals more kindly with the Lord's own standards than do rationalism and radicalism. The pre-Reformation Church passed through the times of degradation and formalism with less violence to these parts of worship than during the later radical and rationalistic periods. This fact was no small factor to the success of the Reformation. The discrepancies in the benedictions now in vogue from the true Biblical forms are relics of the rationalistic recension of those forms. Coming, as they do, from such a source, the ministry and the Church may well look with grave disfavor upon all such unscriptural forms of blessing. Especially should we, who "receive and hold . . . the word of God as contained in the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only infallible rule of faith and practice," be particular in this matter. The radical tendencies of the day will soon bring their harvest of apocryphal rites and forms; in fact, are already beginning to bring them. So we, who hold the evangelical truth of our fathers, should be exceedingly particular to do all things which the Lord has exemplified by His own word in the way He has indicated, "neither adding thereto nor taking from it."

Doubtless there will always be divers forms of worship among Christian people. These forms are susceptible of great variety, yet may be scriptural and give appropriate expression to the act of worship. The development of liturgical services will in the future, as in the past, be determined by the doctrinal position, spiritual life, and poetical or art conception of the denomination. This is because only the nucleus of a form of worship is given us in the New Testament. Since no full forms are there found, liberty must be permitted in details of the development, and variety must be expected. But when we make use of such parts as the Lord's Prayer, the formula of baptism, and the benediction, the idea of developing or changing them should be set aside. They rest upon an entirely different basis from the general liturgical forms which are made to cluster around them. The Lord's Prayer, the words attending the dispensing of the supper, and the formula of baptism have been brought in here only to show that the benediction does not stand alone in this respect, and to remind the reader that in these things, whatever be our forms of worship, all evangelical Christians occupy common ground. The details of worship may and do change to meet the spiritual wants of God's people, but what God declares to us in explicit terms, used in that worship, ought not to be changed by us. Much in

worship is our offering, our spiritual sacrifice to our Father, and will ever be expressed among different peoples in different ways, but there is that in the worship which God brings to us, and it is characterized by fullness of grace and permanence of form. Perhaps, as long as the world stands, men will differ in forms of worship, but God will never change in the riches of His grace toward men, nor in the perfect forms which He has given for the bestowal of the blessing of that grace. Our faith concerning the Church is that, whatever of human differences are not according to divine wisdom, in God's own good time will be eliminated from the faith and worship of the Church; that His promise to His Church that it shall be altogether perfect and complete will be specifically fulfilled, for it is said, "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it: that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." When the glorious end here contemplated is consummated, when the Church of Christ will be adorned as a Bride ready for the Bridegroom, when all human misconception and error will have been purged out, then, as now, the Lord's words of prayer will still be offered. His words of sacramental import will still be employed, and His words of benediction will still fall, with the blessing of His name and grace, upon His faithful ones.

The Lord bless thee and keep thee:

The Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee:

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.

Let all the people say,

"Amen."

1. See Mem. Lit. Asso., vol. iv., pages 73-77.↩

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Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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